

Inferring the Dramatic in Donne:

A Metacritical Study

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## ABSTRACT

This study argues that those features perceived to be strikingly “dramatic” about certain lyric poems by John Donne are generally inferred on the part of the reader or critical commentator. With recourse to principles of modern linguistics, specifically the field of pragmatics, it becomes clear that inferential potential is subtly guided or implied by the poet, much as a skilled dramatist divulges information regarding setting, character, and situation indirectly through dialogue alone. Similarly, there is no narrative content as such in Donne’s dramatic lyrics; his speakers are not “telling” the reader what is happening in the poems. Rather the dramatic action unfolds in the very utterance, lending the poems the immediacy of live theatrical performance. Some poems possess the qualities of soliloquy and depict a single speaker on the poetic mind-stage. More often, though, the poems in question have a *dramatis personae* comprising the speaker, addressee, and various third parties to the dramatic situation. The text, like a script, often creates a space for listener response or implied dialogue with the result that the reader senses that there is more than one speaker involved, as in a play. The role of the reader is also sometimes implied by the text, creating an additional dynamic node, that of the poetic audience, whose presence is felt as that of a kind of spectator, overhearer, or eavesdropper. It is the way in which the reader, moreover, is required to play an active, creative part, to fill in the gaps of what is only implied in the text itself, that makes Donne’s most memorable poems seem especially dramatic. This dialogic play between reader and poet lends the poems a plastic or fluid quality while at the same time activating the texts with forceful dynamics making them seem self-contained, autonomous, and play-like. The first part of the thesis is a metacritical appraisal of why, when, and how it has been inferred that Donne is particularly deserving of the epithet “dramatic”. It will be seen that the literature reviewed is too heterogeneous to provide a single overarching theory of the dramatic in Donne. The second part explores the many nuances of the *theatrum mundi* topos and the principles of “metadrama”, both of which, it is proposed, inform, often implicitly, much of Donne’s work. The third and final part examines the ways in which Donne’s dramatic economy utilises pragmatic elements such as implicature and deixis through a series of close readings.



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## PART I: DONNE AND THE DRAMATIC: TOWARDS A METACRITICAL THEORY?

*Still that general agreement upon the epithet "dramatic" rather tends to confusion than enlightenment because no two critics seem to understand it in the same sense, and it may well be applied to Donne's poetry in more than one.*—Pierre Legouis, *Donne the Craftsman* (48)

### Introduction

The notion that Donne is a "dramatic" poet, or that his poetry is in some essential way "dramatic", despite the fact that he was not a dramatist, became a commonplace of twentieth-century literary criticism. Indeed, the epithet has been attributed to such a range of qualities of both the poet and his work that clarification of the term is necessary. Semantically, common meanings of the term "dramatic" fall into two general categories: the literal and the figurative. To be literally dramatic, something or someone must be "[o]f, pertaining to, or connected with the, or a, drama; dealing with or employing the forms of the drama" (*OED*); hence "dramatic writer", or "dramatic irony". Figurative applications of the adjective describe someone or something that is considered to be "[c]haracteristic of, or appropriate to, the drama; often connoting animated action or striking presentation, as in a play; theatrical" (*OED*). Usage of the latter kind is often synonymous with other attributives such as "sudden", "exciting", "unexpected", or "vividly striking". Because these definitions have in common the sense of something out of the ordinary, meanings such as "glamorous", "exotic", and even "dangerous" are also often implicitly present. Somewhere between the literal and figurative meanings one can describe something as dramatic in terms of an implied prosaic simile, "like something in a play"; hence "dramatic events" or "dramatic gesture". Often this latter group connotes theatrical affectation and the sense that something is overdone or absurd.

The survey of literature that follows shows that critics who have described Donne as dramatic have generally done so in a figurative sense. This is by and large inevitable considering that Donne was not a dramatist, and to argue that Donne is not a dramatic writer because he did not write plays would be, I suggest, tantamount to a *reductio ad absurdum* (and at least one of the critics discussed below comes close to making such an assertion). The problem arising from figurative usage of the attributive is that of any second-order signification: a tendency towards indeterminacy and ambiguity. Consequently, while the survey of literature that follows provides the necessary background theory for a study such as this, it cannot promise to provide a cohesive, overarching theory of the dramatic in Donne. Rather, it demonstrates numerous inferences drawn from the poet's work and what is known about his life and contemporary readership. These often lead critics to astute and satisfying

interpretations, but remain nonetheless indeterminate and lacking an underpinning context or focal theory. This will be provided in Part II, which comprises an extensive discussion of the *theatrum mundi* topos and the principles of metadrama.

The question also arises as to why it is necessary to conduct a survey of secondary sources on the issue of the dramatic in Donne, rather than cutting to the chase and seeing for oneself what elements within the poetry may or may not warrant the epithet. The answer is that the notion of the dramatic in Donne is discursive both in origin and practice. Donne, as far as is known, never explicitly applied the term to himself or his work, although it could be argued that his celebrated and possibly self-descriptive noun phrase “masculine persuasive force” implies a dramatic element according to the second or third of the definitions given above. Similarly, the poet’s assertion in a letter prefacing “An Hymne to the Saints, and to Marquesse Hamylton” that “I did best when I had least truth for my subject” (quoted in Roston 7), as well as being a caveat against autobiographical readings of his more profane verse, is indicative of a dramatist’s propensity for the inventive characterisation of abstractions *ex nihilo*.

No one amongst his contemporaries is on record as having actually called Donne “dramatic”; indeed, this should not surprise us, for any comparison of his poems with verse written to be performed in the playhouses would hardly have been received as a compliment. Donne’s friend and critic Ben Jonson, himself a professional writer and dramatist, illustrates this prejudice in the following passage from an epigram addressed to Donne around 1610, at a time when Shakespeare was beginning to receive almost ubiquitous acclaim:

Those that for claps doe write,  
Let pui’nees, porters, players praise delight,  
And, till they burst, their backs, like asses load:  
A man should seeke great glorie, and not broad.  
(Smith 1975 68)

Save by Coleridge, it is likely that Donne was never explicitly labelled “dramatic” by anyone until the twentieth century. This indicates that the use of the term says as much about those who used it and, even more pertinently, the age in which it they did so as it does about the subject (Donne, his poetry) that it ostensibly describes.

Donne is dramatic, then, first and foremost because a critical culture arose in the early twentieth century in which he was called dramatic, and this trend continued and even intensified as the century progressed. For this reason expository readings of Donne’s work need to be predicated upon entry into that critical discourse. The survey of literature which follows is arranged to demonstrate that there are three principal areas in which the dramatic in Donne may be perceived: *influence*, *effect*, and *response*. The first, *influence*, incorporates historical, literary, social, political, spiritual, scientific,

psychological, and existential conditions that shaped Donne as a literary personality. The second, *effect*, incorporates the manifestations of those influences in terms of literary technique and specific poetic and stylistic devices. The third, *response*, expands the concept of the dramatic in the sense that it focuses upon poetic audience, the role of the reader, and the text as play script or screenplay. It will be seen that there is a certain amount of interplay between these categories, which is, I suggest, a necessary condition if the possibility is to be entertained that each is an interdependent component in an overarching or totalising theory of the dramatic in Donne. Part of the purpose of the survey of literature is to discover to what extent the various propositions from a range of sources are in agreement and where there are genuinely conflicting arguments. Between these two extremes there is also room for seeming contradictions that in fact prove compatible upon closer analysis, as well as concordant ideas that complement one another, helping to build more sophisticated composite theories. While the treatment of critical material that follows corresponds with the three categories—*influence*, *effect*, *response*—rather than a strict chronological arrangement, I shall start with a few background observations by way of an introduction to the main body of work which is concerned exclusively with critics from the twentieth century.

The earliest and probably most famous written record linking Donne with drama is biographical, and appears in Sir Richard Baker's *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* published in 1643. Baker writes that Donne was "a great frequenter of Playes", but this assertion is not in itself sufficient grounds to argue that the plays Donne frequented as a young man were a direct source of inspiration or provided any kind of formal or technical model for his poetry. The quotation needs to be put into context: Baker's assertion is, ostensibly at least, an apology intended to counter the accepted view that before his marriage and ordination, Donne was an incorrigible rake, *roué*, or profligate, an opinion that arises from an autobiographical association of the speakers in many of his poems with Donne himself. What Baker says is that Donne, on the contrary, was "not dissolute, but very neat; a great visitor of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, a great writer of conceited *Verses*" (Smith 1975 156). It is not difficult to read an element of irony into Baker's words that potentially makes the apology something of an in-joke or innuendo, since the noun "visitor" has definite euphemistic connotations, as does "frequenter". Baker, however, neither says that Donne loved nor that he was inspired or influenced by the theatre, merely that he was seen there often, possibly for primarily social reasons. Apposition, moreover, links the frequenting with the visiting and thus with the ladies. The last of the three noun phrases that make up the anaphora tells us nothing that any contemporary reader of Baker's would not have already known, and the irrelevance or redundancy of this adds to the likely overall irony of the scheme. The assertion that he was "very neat" can only refer to appearance—grooming, attire, and bearing—and is no guarantee that his character

was “not dissolute” on a moral level. The two adjectives do not even belong to the same scalar paradigm. The negation also implies that while “dissolute” may be a slightly harsh judgement, it may come close to fitting the mark. Baker may well be implying, accurately or otherwise, that Donne was indeed a well-known ladies’ man in his youth, but that he conducted himself in a fashionable and therefore superficially respectable manner. Moreover, it is possible that by “dissolute” Baker may have simply meant “wasteful” or “lavish” rather than “licentious” or “profligate” (*OED*). In any case, the account of Donne the playgoer really says nothing about Donne the poet; the redundancy of the reference to “conceited *Verses*” therefore undermines any potential association through apposition with the former.

In 1693 John Dryden, in a disquisition on satiric poetry dedicated to Charles, Earl of Dorset, and prefixed to his verse translation of the satires of Juvenal and Persius, made a famous and much-quoted remark that Donne “affects the Metaphysicks, not only in his Satires, but in his Amorous Verses, where Nature only shou’d reign; and perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice Speculations of Philosophy, when he shou’d engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of Love” (Smith 1975 151). Dryden means to upbraid Donne for being too cerebral, especially for love poetry, on the grounds that philosophical speculation is an inappropriate choice for the language of seduction. The verb “affect”, however, serves to qualify and soften the criticism by implying that Donne merely acts the part of the metaphysical or philosophical poet and does not take his own arguments or their sources entirely seriously, thereby getting away with otherwise indecorous imagery.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was much impressed by the final couplet of Donne’s “A Feaver” (“Yet I had rather owner be / Of thee one hour, than all else ever”) even though he found the rest of the poem “detestable”. It was in fact Coleridge’s firm belief that, generally, “Donne’s poetry must be sought in his prose” (Brinkley 205, 529). Yet he explicitly terms these two lines “dramatic” in the sense that they express “the outburst of a transient feeling, itself the symbol of a deeper feeling, that would have made *one* hour, *known* to be *only* one hour (or even one year) a perfect hell!” (523). Here the epithet “dramatic” is employed not as a direct allusion to the drama or its conventions but rather to a relation between passion (“the outburst of transient feeling”) and a more rational sensibility comprising both emotion and reason (“a deeper feeling”). The fact that the former is a “symbol”, a figure or vehicle for the tenor of the latter, is also significant and perhaps surprising coming from one of the romantics, for it suggests that feeling tempered with reason is a more essential form of sensibility than rapturous passion. Coleridge’s remarks also allow for the consideration that all symbolic or figurative language is dramatic in the sense that one term, image, or affect is like an actor playing the part of and thus mediating, or interpreting, another deeper level meaning from which it emerges telescopically. The concept of relations between

feeling and thought providing a definition of the dramatic in Donne will be introduced again in various forms by several of the critics yet to be surveyed.

One such example of observation of the dramatic relation in Donne between feeling and thought, the somatic and the cerebral, is provided by W.B. Yeats, who also ushers us into the realms of early twentieth-century criticism. Writing on Donne's sensuality, Yeats observes a reluctance in the poet

to linger, or rather to pretend that we can linger, between spirit and sense. How often had I heard men of my time talk of the meeting of spirit and sense, yet there is no meeting but only a change upon the instant, and it is by the perception of a change, like the sudden "blacking out" of the lights of the stage, that passion creates its most violent sensation. (Kermode 415).

If "spirit and sense" are understood in this context more or less as synonyms of "thought and feeling" respectively, or are at least accepted as a parallel pair of concepts, the latter term suggests an association between emotion and the physical senses which is in accord with Coleridge's "outburst of transient feeling" and places "spirit" at the level of "deeper feeling". Yeats does not believe in any kind of poetic fusion or even contiguity of the two and in this respect his vision is cruder than that of Coleridge. It is interesting nonetheless because what Yeats finds dramatic (and this is strongly suggested by the allusion to stage lighting) is the violence of the moment of transition, perhaps of transcendence, in which the one becomes the other. "Blacking out" "violent sensation", and the lack of any reference to perception following the "change upon the instant" are all suggestive of the moment of death, and an atheistic death at that. It is therefore not unreasonable to surmise that part of what Yeats finds attractive and dramatic in Donne is his preoccupation with death and his uncertainty about the reality of an afterlife. Sense and spirit (now meaning an immortal soul, if there is such a thing) are unlikely bedfellows according to such a vision.

This preliminary discussion has already provided several potential definitions for aspects of the dramatic in Donne involving the concept of acting in the sense of role-play (Dryden) and substitution or mediation (Coleridge), the relation between feeling and thought, body and soul (Coleridge, Yeats), and points of sudden transition (Yeats). These concepts do not strike me as incompatible, undeveloped and disparate as they may be. This is because none is antithetical to the basic premise that there is something essentially dramatic about Donne's work. The critical stances presented in this introduction will be encountered again in different forms under the categories of *influence*, *effect*, and *response* in the chapters that follow, along with others (namely those of Chari and Harris) that constitute what I consider a useful "negative hypothesis" of the dramatic in Donne.

## Chapter One

### Influence

The publication in 1912 of H.J.C. Grierson's two-volume edition of *The Poems of John Donne* initiated a resurgence of interest in the poet. Interest, let alone appreciation, was sporadic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and Jonson, who predicted in a conversation with William Drummond of Hawthornden in 1619 "that Done [*sic*] himself, for not being understood, would perish" (Patterson 18; Smith 1975 70), could well have been proved right, although the complexity of syntax and esoteric references that made Donne difficult would not necessarily have been the only reason for neglect. On the contrary, the very complexity of his verse appears to be one of the major factors that appealed to a significant number of the modernists.

In the introduction to his 1912 edition (Volume 2), Grierson comments upon "the conflict which wages perpetually in Donne's poetry between feeling and intellect" (x), while adding that "the wit [in the modern sense of the word] of the Elizabethans is delightfully blended with fancy and feeling. There is a little of Jaques in all of them" (x). Nor is Jaques the only Shakespearean point of reference. Of the *Songs and Sonets* Grierson writes:

His attitude is very much that of Shakespeare in the early comedies. But the Petrarchan love, which Shakespeare treats with light and charming irony, the vows and tears of Romeo and Proteus, Donne openly scoffs. He is one of Shakespeare's young men as these were in the flesh and the Inns of Court, and he tells us frankly what in their youthful cynicism (which is often even more of a pose than their idealism) they think of love, and constancy, and women. (xi)

Although Grierson considers this brash cynicism merely a youthful phase that Donne would outgrow, he reiterates the notion of "the tendency of his passionate heart and satiric wit to break through the prescribed tone of worship and complaint" that are the mainstays of Petrarchan convention (xxv). He also discerns in Donne, as in Shakespeare and Browning, a heightened use of ordinary, everyday experiences (xxxviii). Of the *Elegies* he claims that only Shakespeare's sonnets and those of the mature Drayton possess the same "dramatic intensity", although he considers Donne's verse to be lacking in charm compared to that of Shakespeare (xlii).

Elsewhere, Grierson suggests that Donne, the sincere sensualist whose love poetry shows signs both of attraction and repulsion toward his love object, is in command of "a greater complexity of moods, a wider dramatic range, than the first impression suggests, so much so that . . . this poetry is a more complete mirror than any other . . . of love as a complex passion in which sense and soul are inextricably blended" (1948 145). The language Donne uses, moreover, "is not that of Courtly love-

poetry, but of simpler people" (146); in terms of diction Grierson rejects the term "metaphysical" with regard to Donne, preferring to draw comparisons with the love poetry of the Middle Ages and with contemporary Elizabethan theatre: "Now it was just the simpler, more normal feeling and attitude towards the purpose and significance of love that was the theme of the early Elizabethan drama, and notably of Shakespeare's romantic comedy and tragedy" (147).

With regard to Elizabethan drama, and to Shakespeare in particular, Grierson makes a number of claims that are of relevance to the concept of the dramatic in Donne. Firstly, he argues that the English theatre of the time performed for both the Court and the populace; in other words, the focus was on entertainment leaving little room for refined sensibility or high-minded rumination. As Grierson puts it, "[s]erious thought in England was directed towards the pulpit, not the stage" (116). Secondly, Grierson notes, from about 1565 the theatre came under constant attack for both religious and political reasons, culminating with the Long Parliament's closing of public theatres in 1642. Play acting was seen by some Puritan elements as sinful by its very nature; and the following passage from William Prynne's *Histriomastix* of 1633 illustrates an association of the alleged sacrilegious abuses of play acting with the Roman Catholic Church:

No verily, for the Jefuites themselves are not affhamed to publifh to the world, *that in ftead of preaching the Word of God, the fall of Adam and Eve, with their exile out of Paradife, and the hiftory oꝝ our Saviour, they acted and played them among their Indian Profelites.* A true Jefuiticall practife, befeeming well this hiftrionically infernall Society, *who have turned the very truth of God into a lie, and the whole fervice oꝝ God into an Enterlude.* (117; quoted in Grierson 1948 76).

Thirdly, Grierson believes that Shakespeare, in whom the artistry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century theatre culminates, is not concerned chiefly with ethical didacticism but rather with presenting human behaviour in all its glory and treachery while avoiding, even to the point of unacceptable acquiescence, any hint of moral comment (86). I would add as a qualification of Grierson's point that it is not so much that moral issues are not present in the plays; on the contrary, they proliferate. But the characters are generally allowed to proceed with the dramatic action without any sense of moralising authorial intervention (although there are notable exceptions, such as the Fool in *King Lear*, who may be considered instrumental to a distanced and ironised version of the kind of intervention Shakespeare typically avoids).

Shakespearean tragedy, like the comedies, is, according to Grierson, devoid of moral judgement and religious undertones. Nor does it present heroes "tormented by inner conflict" (115), at least not explicitly so in terms of conflicting principles which contemporary audiences cared to identify or from which they drew moral lessons.



Rather, Grierson argues, Shakespeare's tragic heroes act on immediate impulses of feeling that result in their own destruction (117). He defines this as follows:

The tragic conflict in Shakespeare's tragedies is . . . not a conflict of principles or of principle with passion, but of passion with the limits set to human power. His greatest and most comprehensible and moving tragedies represent a great character swept from his moorings by a storm of passion and finally broken by the circumstances against which passion drives him in headlong career. (116)

To summarise, Grierson's observations are important because they present a more developed and sophisticated concept of relations between feeling and thought, body and soul than those already discussed in connection with Coleridge and Yeats. Grierson perceives in Donne's love poetry a conflict between feeling and intellect that is balanced by a Jaquesian blend of fancy (or imagination) and feeling. A rejection of Petrarchan convention and the language of Courtly love poetry in favour of quotidian experiences and diction lends the verse a certain "dramatic intensity". Meanwhile, the term "dramatic range" refers to Donne's considerable "complexity of moods", which multiplicity, Grierson implies, serves to override the element of conflict by making possible a mirroring "of love as a complex passion in which sense and soul are inextricably blended". Finally, Grierson's account of drama in the age of Donne suggests that in the poet's authorial voice one should expect a dearth of normative moralising and in his personae not an inner conflict of passion against principle, or principle against principle, but rather an existential struggle between desire and the limitations placed upon the will's ability to shape the external world.

Like Grierson, T.S. Eliot, in his influential article "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), questions the efficacy of the term "metaphysical" in accounting for the important elements and influences in seventeenth-century English poetry (281, 290). In the dramatists of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period Eliot perceives a "development of sensibility" which, he suggests, is traceable to the influence of Montaigne (286). Accordingly, he argues, generically non-dramatic poets such as Donne and Herbert are rightly to be considered "reflective" as opposed to merely "intellectual":

A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (287)

But the purported "unification of sensibility" resulting from this development would prove, according to Eliot's theory, momentary and short-lived, eventually to be

displaced in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century by a “sentimental age” that would continue through the romantics and Victorians up to the early twentieth century. Eliot sees this period as a revolt against ratiocination and narrative description that he considers reflective (conflicting with his use of the term discussed above and below) and ruminative. The use of language in this period becomes more refined, but at the expense of feeling, which becomes more crude.

The main part of Eliot’s essay is given over to the expostulation of a now legendary theory which is more or less summed up in the following passage:

The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less nor more than Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guinicelli, or Cino. In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. (288)

But Eliot’s notion of a “unification of sensibility” with regard to Donne evidently shifted quite drastically in the six years separating the above passage from the following, in his essay “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca” (1927):

In making some very commonplace investigations of the “thought” of Donne, I found it quite impossible to come to the conclusion that Donne believed anything. It seemed as if, at that time, the world was filled with broken fragments of systems, and that a man like Donne merely picked up, like a magpie, various shining fragments of ideas as they struck his eye, and stuck them about here and there in his verse. . . . a vast jumble of incoherent erudition on which he drew for purely poetic effects. (1932 138-9)

While Eliot evidently grew weary of Donne as the latter became the darling of the New Critics (see Larson 94-5), his quotation nonetheless needs to be considered in context insofar as Eliot is comparing Donne to Shakespeare, his main topic, to whom he wishes to ascribe, neither unusually nor contentiously, a diacritical position in relation to his contemporaries. What is interesting about this passage is that the reference to “shining fragments” eclectically gathered by the “magpie” Donne is totally in keeping with the notion of the “reflective” as opposed to the “intellectual” outlined above. The implication is that for Donne thought is not a medium for the presentation of belief or facts but rather that it provides access to an encyclopaedic collection of disparate concepts and images through which the reflective poet expresses emotional experience. Indeed, Eliot later writes, in his essay “Donne in our Time”, arguing against the common perception that Donne is a sceptic, that “it is only that he is interested in and

amused by ideas in themselves, and interested in the way in which he feels an idea; almost as if it were something that he could touch and stroke" (Spencer 12).

In the same essay Eliot expresses the belief that "Donne enlarged the possibilities of English verse as no other English poet has done" (14), and that his lyrics are "dramatic", both in monologue and dialogue (here Eliot is in agreement with Pierre Legouis, whom I shall discuss later). Donne's influence occurs, moreover, within the domain of the revolutionary influence of dramatic blank verse, "the perfect vehicle for impassioned thought" (14). Eliot adds, in what strikes me as rather an abstruse passage, that "lyric verse, under these conditions, remained subordinate to the musical instrument and the dramatic moment" (14). I suggest that the meaning here becomes clearer if the conjunction "and" is given emphasis; in which case the assertion is that while lyric poetry was more or less obliged to accommodate the influence of dramatic blank verse, with its propensity for expressing "impassioned thought" in a "dramatic setting", it also had to remain faithful to its own genre based on the idea of a song sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, which calls for a more extensive use of rhyme and greater metrical and stanzaic, or formal, variation than blank verse has to offer. This is presumably what Eliot has in mind when, in "The Metaphysical Poets", he pays homage to "the massive music of Donne" (291).

Despite its dependence upon the purported influence of dramatic blank verse on Donne, Eliot's project advocating the idea of a unification and subsequent dissociation of sensibility in the poetry of the seventeenth century is not especially relevant to this study, and it is worth noting that he does not apply his famous term directly to Donne or to any of his contemporaries (288). It is also worth noting that his interest in Donne and his contemporaries derives partially from a partisan agenda to establish a self-affirming poetic affiliation between his own generation and pre-romantic, pre-Augustan precursors. Like Donne, Eliot was an ambitious outsider. Something of this self-interested quest for poetic identity is discernible in his assertion that "Donne's poetry is a concern of the present and the recent past, rather than of the future" (Spencer 5).

The contribution of Eliot's ideas to the concept of the dramatic in Donne is, then, as follows. Influenced by the dramatists of the sixteenth century, he argues, the lyric poets of the seventeenth become reflective rather than intellectual. Through a constant amalgamation of disparate experience they are able to create new poetic wholes in which thought and experience are fused. The term "experience" implies dramatic action that is both worldly (hence "dramatic setting") and impassioned. With Donne in particular the lyric poem is seen to evolve to an unprecedented level of dramaticity. While Eliot is less than explicit about the precise nature of this development, I would suggest that it concerns to a large extent the evolution of what has come to be called the "dramatic lyric", in which, rather than "express[ing] a state of mind" while "musing in solitude", first person speakers of lyric poems enact "a process of thought and feeling"

wherein they are “represented in a particular situation, addressing themselves to another person” (Abrams 97). Eliot does mention, however, that he considers Donne, like Dryden after him, a reformer of poetic language because “both brought in a vital and energetic simplicity, and natural conversational speech in verse” (Spencer 17).

In his 1951 book *The Monarch of Wit*, J.B. Leishman observes in Donne’s poetry “the dialectical expression of personal drama” (20), from which observation he suggests that Donne is, strictly speaking, not a “metaphysical” poet in a philosophic sense, but rather, and as Dryden would have it, that he “affected” what has come to be called a metaphysical style through the many references to philosophy, scholastic theology and science that are to be found in his poetry. Leishman notes, citing the opening lines of “The good-morrow”, “The Canonization”, and “Lovers’ Infiniteness” that “Donne’s most memorable lines are personal and dramatic” (27). This dramatic quality, which Leishman finds predominantly in the *Songs and Sonets* and some of the *Elegies*, is listed second in importance among the four “formal characteristics” that he identifies in the *Songs and Sonets*, along with “dialectical wit” (the major quality), “logical construction”, and “colloquial diction”, and is defined as the “dramatization of actual or imaginary experiences, situations, attitudes” (145-6).

For Leishman, Donne’s dramatic quality is one that distances the poet from his speakers and renders the poems non-autobiographical:

Donne had an unusual liking and capacity for what children call ‘dressing up’, and . . . the fact that he can describe a situation or express an attitude with convincing realism and dramatic truth is no proof that he has actually been in that situation or seriously and habitually accepted that attitude. (147)

In this vein, Leishman challenges not only readings that identify the poet with his speakers, but also those which attempt to equate the addressees with real-life persons of Donne’s acquaintance.

Although non-autobiographical, the dramatic situations presented in the poetry are, for Leishman, nevertheless closely related to and a product of Donne’s temperament and the private drama of his life. Indeed, in his biographical chapter he actually presents Donne’s life as a drama in three “acts”. The first of these acts finds Donne at Lincoln’s Inn “leading . . . a very intense and varied life, and throwing himself with characteristic energy and wholeness into whatever part he had elected” (30). This is also the time that Donne was known as a “great frequenter of Playes”. In the second so-called act of Donne’s life, the protagonist is “a more sober, a more melancholy, a more Hamlet-like Donne, who ‘lacks advancement’ and who, although he is still capable of brilliant wit and intense intellectual exertion, is often afflicted by moods of deep depression, in which his isolatedness seems total and insuperable and his hold on life but slight” (35). This period follows his imprudent decision to marry

Ann More and all the social and professional repercussions thereof.<sup>1</sup> Leishman sees Donne at this time as an actor without a part, a dilemma which is resolved, to some degree, when he eventually takes Orders and becomes “Donne the preacher” and enters the third act of his life (39).

It is in the second “act” of Donne’s life, the “Hamlet” years, that Leishman discerns a man of many parts and no part, who often views life with world-weariness, incredulity and detachment, and for whom the only possible escape from a congenital sense of self-haunted morbidity is, ironically perhaps, death:

Yes, there are many resemblances between Donne and Hamlet: the alternation between intense activity, sometimes occupying itself with trifles, and deep depression; the longing . . . for death, the detachment, the double vision, the tenderness and the hardness. And yet in some . . . respects, there is an even greater likeness between Donne and that king who played many parts and who delighted to watch himself playing them, knowing that, in a sense, they were only parts, and he himself only a player, appearing in life’s insubstantial pageant. . . . Donne was, I often feel, in the sense in which Shakespeare’s Richard [III] was, an actor of parts, sometimes consciously, but almost always, I think, half-consciously, watching himself playing them, and almost always at least half-aware that the stage upon which he played them was but a stage. (48-9)

According to Leishman it is this awareness that all the actions and values of humanity are mere vanity, passing shadows, that dominates Donne’s persona and makes him aware, even when he finds his “role” as a preacher, that the world is indeed a stage and that the ultimate aim of the pulpit performance is to make just that point. Leishman refers to such a poetics as “the doctrine of the mask” which, operating through processes of self-dramatisation, is contrasted with “the modern cult of sincerity” and gives rise to the kind of “dramatic lyrical expression” favoured and exemplified in the twentieth century by Yeats (50).

The dramatic in Donne, as far as Leishman is concerned, is the product of a psychological predisposition towards a curious detachment and sense of poetic privacy. Not only, then, does he, like Eliot, question the term “metaphysical” as a suitable epithet for the poetry, but he also challenges Eliot’s theory of a “unification of sensibility” in Donne and his contemporaries (90-7). For Leishman, such a notion implies a sense of immediacy that is irreconcilable with his concept of “the dialectical expression of personal drama” stemming from a self-haunted psyche, unable to escape the insubstantiality of all that humanity holds dear, but nevertheless compelled to exercise ultimately futile attempts to lose himself, to hide from that ontological anxiety, behind the fictional masks he donned (Leishman would probably like the pun) in his poetry. The meta-narrative that runs through these attempts is an awareness, a homiletic

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Spencer, in his essay “Donne and his Age” proffers an extended parallel between Shakespeare’s tragic hero and this phase of Donne’s life (Spencer pp. 186-99).

demonstration, of their very dramaticity: the fact that the speaker and the utterance have no point of reference beyond the boundaries of the hypothetical worlds constructed within the poetic utterance. Ultimately, I suggest, Leishman's ideas are not really at odds with those of Eliot, despite the fact that the opposing concepts of "unification" and "detachment" would appear to indicate so. Eliot is talking about an alleged relation pertaining between thought and feeling in an aesthetic sense, which has more to do with effect than influence. Leishman, on the other hand, proposes a psychological predisposition on the part of Donne that bears an influence on the dynamics of the relations obtaining between the poet and his speakers.

Helen Gardner, in her essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1962), associates Donne and the other poets of the so-called metaphysical school with "the flowering of the drama" that occurred in the 1590s (Keast 39). Her thoughts on the subject include reasons why Donne would not have considered becoming a dramatist himself and how the influence of the drama manifests in his "desire to make poems out of particular moments, made imaginatively present rather than remembered, and played over by wit rather than reflected upon" (40):

Metaphysical poetry is the poetry of the great age of our drama. Its master John Donne was, we are told "a great frequenter of plays" in his youth. As an ambitious young man of social standing he would not have considered writing for the players, and his work is too personal, wilful, and idiosyncratic for us to imagine him doing so with any success. But his strong dramatic imagination of particular situations transforms the lyric and makes a metaphysical poem more than an epigram expanded by conceits. . . . The vehement, colloquial tone of the Satire "Of Religion" creates the sense of an actual historical situation in which urgent choices present themselves. In the three splendid Elegies a man is speaking to a woman at a moment when all the faculties are heightened, as in drama, by the thought of what impends. He is about to go to the wars—what will she say to him when he returns, perhaps mutilated? He has to travel and she wants to come with him as his page—he is horrified at the thought of such romantic folly and implores her to be his true mistress and "home of love". With the tide of passion rising in him, impatient for the moment when she will be his, he watches her undressing for bed. The sense of the moment gives Donne's wit its brilliance and verve, the aptness and incongruity of the comparisons being created by their contexts. (39-40)

Interestingly, Gardner does not consider this dramatic quality of "sense of presence" to apply to all of Donne's poetry. But her synopses of selected poems suggest that she considers the speaker and the addressees of these poems to be the same two characters.

In the introduction to her 1965 edition of *The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets* [sic], Gardner discerns in Donne as a writer of love poetry other qualities that she associates with dramatic verse, especially that of Shakespeare. In particular she identifies two attributes that make him "our greatest love-poet". First, she argues that "the range of mood and experience in his love-poetry is greater than can be found in the poetry of any single other non-dramatic writer". Secondly, she maintains that, rather

than conforming to the lyrical convention that portrays “the sense of unworthiness in face of the overwhelming worth of the beloved”, “he has given supreme expression to a theme that is rarely expressed in lyric poetry, and finds expression in drama rather than in lyric, the theme of the rapture of fulfilment and of all the bliss of union in love” (xvii).

Gardner suggests that the plays Donne had seen are a likely source for some of the situations represented in individual love poems. She argues, too, that the poems are dramatic in the sense that they “are single and complete, as a play is single and complete” (xviii). This notion of “a corpus of discrete poems” (xviii) is certainly applicable to the *Songs and Sonets*, which stand autonomous one from another, thus confounding attempts at ordering into anything more than a rudimentary chronology.

By way of a tribute to Donne’s imaginative powers Gardner notes that “the dramatic intensity of present experience” (xix) to be found in the wide variety of situations portrayed in the love poems gives rise to a sense of immediacy that profits from avoiding “the brooding tone of memory or the poignant note of hope” (xix) typical of other exponents of the genre. She argues that, even when it is not possible to discern a strictly dramatic or exact situation, “Donne assumes the role that a poem demands with dramatic zest and consistency” (xx). At the same time, his “dramatic imagination” is able to transform poetic conventions while disguising the nature of his sources (xxi). It is important to note, however, that the epithet “dramatic”, as used here, does not mean “superficial” or “insincere”, and it is argued that Donne is obliged to maintain an extraordinary “truth of feeling” in order for his dramatic method to succeed; as Gardner puts it: “[t]he bright light of drama, which heightens and exaggerates, is fatal to weakness or falsity of feeling” (xxii).

To summarise, Gardner finds the influence of the drama evident in Donne’s range of mood and experience coupled with an immediate intensity of presence (and in doing so suggests the kind of compatibility that I argue obtains between the ideas of Eliot and Cruttwell below; unity and disparity, immediacy and distance need not be mutually exclusive qualities in literature). Often marking a radical departure from conventions inherited from Petrarch, the love poems stand autonomous, like mini-dramas, and the poet’s dramatic imagination transforms and disguises his sources to a degree that renders them unrecognisable.

Patrick Cruttwell builds on some of Gardner’s observations, arguing that Donne’s poetry emanates from what he terms the “Shakespearean moment” in the 1590s, when there occurred a discernible “shift in sensibility” away from the courtly and Petrarchan models of the early-Elizabethan sonneteers. As with the mature works of Shakespeare, he proposes, what is specifically “dramatic” about Donne is the way he uses language to affect “living speech”. Among the “new-found methods” employed by the poet is the playwright’s objective of achieving a sustained and developing

momentum, grounded on an awareness that in terms of both genre and etymology “drama” means “action”. Thus words are selected and arranged not out of any primary aesthetic concern for their beauty in their own right, but for their expediency toward expressiveness of function. In dramatic literature, then, words are not merely self-contemplative in the manner of the lyrical tradition but, as Cruttwell puts it, employed principally that they may fulfil the specular task of “keeping their eye on their subject” (58). That is not to say, however, that this kind of dramatic objectivity is not self-aware or self-present. Unlike earlier Renaissance verse, Cruttwell claims, the new poetry of the 1590s is non-formulaic, for it does not simply apply established literary conventions but is actively intent on transforming them. This metamorphic impetus is evidence in itself of an innate self-reflexive dramaticity that enacts the process it describes in the very act of enunciation.

Donne’s much cited youthful fondness for popular theatre is proposed as a likely influence in his own work, and Cruttwell reminds us that Shakespeare and Donne, although probably not well if at all acquainted, were almost exact contemporaries. Little wonder then, he claims, that “the image of the play” should be so natural a metaphor for both writers (42). Linguistically, Cruttwell perceives the ramifications of such an influence in a number of Donne’s poems—“The Extasie”, “The Apparition”, “The Sunne Rising”, “The Relique”—displaying grammatical shifts or vacillations between second and third person, a device that effectively “invokes a hypothetical spectator” (44). Formally, this theatricality is often augmented by a tripartite structure echoing the Aristotelian dramaturgic paradigm of beginning, middle, and end.

In terms of character and situation Cruttwell considers Donne dramatic in his ability to transform the specific into the universal. The varying presence in the work of both poet and his speakers constitutes a “multiple personality” such as is found in the mature Shakespearean canon. This indeterminate subjectivity, Cruttwell argues, lends itself to a multiplicity of perspective that is essentially dramatic because the consequential shifting of focus suggests momentum. (One might even add that concepts such as multiple or composite perspective, and focal variation and layering have only begun to realise their full generically dramatic potential since the advent of cinematography.)

For Cruttwell, the logical extension of the notion that the essence of drama resides in a shift from the specific to the universal is that the dynamic interaction between characters is of secondary importance to the psychological drama internal to the speaking subject. He argues that Donne’s multiple personality gives rise to an interplay between an array of ever-changing moods, and that it is these rather than the speakers and addressees of the poems that constitute the *dramatis personae*. Mental activity is thereby privileged over the physical as the seat of dramatic momentum. This is a bold



and contentious move, for it is tantamount to claiming that what is most definitively dramatic about *Hamlet* is the soliloquies, rather than the physically interactive dramatic situations which they merely serve to punctuate, explicate, and contextualise.

In addition to the ideas discussed above on the various implications of the dramatic in Donne, Cruttwell opposes, quite ingeniously, the indeterminate flux of dramatic momentum and the divisive Protestant-Puritan mind-set that came to dominate Donne's age, at the same time reminding us of drama's almost exclusively secular subject matter after the Reformation, and the eventual closing of the theatres in 1642. This aspect of Cruttwell's argument could be interpreted as an invitation to infer an affinity between dramaticity in literature and (Anglo-)Catholicism. With specific regard to Donne, moreover, Cruttwell identifies an ideological conflict between the dramatic multiple personality and the "singleness of the mystical vision" (48); indeed, a spiritually aspiring speaker bears witness to the validity of such a contrast in the opening line of the *Holy Sonnet* "Oh, to vex me, contraries meete in one".

In conclusion, Cruttwell perceives Donne as dramatic in his proclivity for adopting the idioms of living speech, thus creating a poetic diction that is functional rather than aesthetic, serving primarily to further the dramatic action of the depicted situation. Essentially non-formulaic, such a poetic strategy has the dynamic force to transform convention. Cruttwell also identifies in many of Donne's poems (which Gardner has already proclaimed as individual play-like entities) a tripartite structure reminiscent of the Aristotelian model for dramatic form. Also mentioned obliquely is the *theatrum mundi* topos, which is discussed in more detail in relation to Warnke below and in Part II of the thesis. While many of Cruttwell's observations are germane to the following section which deals with the palpable effects of dramatic influence to be found in Donne's work, his predominant concept concerns the influence of the historical and literary moment on Donne's psyche. What is most dramatic in Donne for Cruttwell, then, is the internal psychological drama of a multiple personality at odds with both the predominant mind set and its own spiritual and secular aspirations. The power of this kind of drama, he argues, is its ability in terms of character and situation to transform the specific into the universal.

Frank J. Warnke considers Donne to be "very much a man of his age", insofar as that age is more broadly defined than that of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean dramatists. Warnke specifically identifies Donne with the European baroque period, which fell approximately between 1580 and 1680. This locates the young Donne in the early baroque period, which in turn overlaps with the Mannerist period of the late Renaissance ("Mannerist" sometimes being used synonymously with "Metaphysical" in the field of literature). Warnke lists the character traits for which the art of the baroque period is notable: "extravagance, psychological tension, theatricality, eccentricity, and originality", coupled with a "quirkiness and intricacy" of thought (12). The baroque is

also the age of scepticism and individualism initiated by Montaigne, partially in response to new scientific developments, challenging the reliability of sense impressions and giving rise to what Warnke considers “*the* defining feature of the baroque sensibility—a radical and abiding doubt as to the reality of the phenomenal world” (18-19).

The baroque literary style of which, Warnke argues, Donne—along with Montaigne, Bacon, Burton, and Pascal—is a key exponent, “aspires to give the impression of a mind in the very process of forming its thoughts” resulting in literature “that has affinities with the drama or meditation rather than with the oration” (17). The sense of scepticism regarding the phenomenal world, noted above, also accounts, it is suggested, for “the baroque fondness for two venerable topoi: the world-as-theater and life-as-a-dream” (19). Warnke’s notion of the Metaphysical or Mannerist literary style as signally “intellectualized, nervous, distorted, and *dramatic*” (18, my emphasis) is explicated emphatically and at some length:

The dramatic, indeed the theatrical, is perhaps the major constituent of the baroque imagination. The seventeenth century is the great age of western European drama; the baroque lyric is partially defined by its dramatic *modus operandi*; and the great prose styles of the age, on the Continent as well as in England, are notable for their intensely dramatic quality. For Donne, as for Shakespeare . . . the venerable topos of the world as theater, the *theatrum mundi*, had an obsessive status—in life as well as in art.

To see the world as a stage is not to flee reality, or to compromise one’s sense of it, but rather to find a means of engaging reality as fully as possible. . . . [T]here are three major ways in which the relation of world and theater may be conceived: ‘the theater resembles the world’ . . . ‘the world *resembles* the theater’ . . . ‘the world *is* the theater, and the theater is the world.’ This last conception asserts that neither one is more ‘theatrical’ or feigned than the other, for in a phenomenal world of illusory appearance all is theater that is not God, and God finally has the combined functions of playwright, stage director, and audience. This conception—*theater-is world and world-is-theater*—dominates and virtually defines the baroque imagination. (10)

As far as Donne is concerned the theatre topos accounts for such factors, Warnke proposes, as

the strong element of role playing in the *Elegies* and elsewhere . . . the strongly dramatic cast of virtually all the lyrics, profane and sacred alike. . . . [and] the relationship between the formal meditation and the creation of the self as a character on the stage of an internal drama [which] is epitomized in the *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, in which the phases of the poet’s illness become a series of dramatic encounters. (10)

Warnke and Cruttwell are in agreement, then, that the theatre is a natural metaphor to both Donne and Shakespeare, although unlike Cruttwell Warnke does not consider this an effect of the ascendancy of Elizabethan drama *per se* but rather the representation of the intellectual mood of a generation, typified by a growing scepticism

about the phenomenal world which in turn renders the *theatrum mundi* topos predominant. The concept of formal meditation that Warnke mentions as an additional influential factor in Donne's dramatic is derived from yet another prominent critical source now to be considered.

In his influential book *The Poetry of Meditation* (1954), Louis L. Martz argues that the *Spiritual Exercises* of the Jesuit Saint Ignatius Loyola constitute a model influencing formal compositional techniques in the poetry of Donne and others of his contemporaries. These exercises were originally intended to take place over a month of continual contemplation but were gradually adapted to cover the central aspects of Christian faith in an hour or two of daily meditation over a similar period. The meditative method, moreover, is cyclical rather than linear and each period depicts "a regular sequence of beginning, middle, and end: preparatory steps; meditation proper, divided into 'points'; followed by 'colloquies', in which the soul speaks intimately with God and expresses its affections, resolutions, thanksgivings, and petitions" (27).

The first important prelude, following a preparatory prayer, is the "composition of place" or "seeing the spot", an exercise of the imagination whereby the meditator does his or her best to virtually conjure up the setting for the subject of the meditation (one's deathbed, sins, or the fires of hell, for example) in as much detail as can be afforded. Martz emphasises the importance of this practice to religious poetry "to provide a concrete and vivid setting for a meditation on invisible things" (28). It is important to note that Martz sees this practice in terms of "performance" and "dramatisation". He cites "those grand and passionate openings of Donne's 'Holy Sonnets', where the moment of death, or the Passion of Christ, or the Day of Doom is there, now, before the eyes of the writer, brought home to the soul by vivid 'similitudes'" (31) as particularly germane examples of the influence of the Ignatian method of composition of place.

In the second phase of the meditation, the devotee undertakes a rigorous intellectual inquiry of issues prompted by the composition of place. Following this phase the devotee addresses a "petition" to God, asking that the object of the exercise may be achieved in accordance with the subject-matter. The point of this phase is not only that the end result is foreseen and therefore creatively visualised, but also that "the specific progress of the meditation toward this end is carefully charted and practised beforehand" (33). This phase, then, is a "premeditation" or a rehearsal of the meditation proper that follows and which constitutes a spiritual analysis of whatever mystery is the subject of the exercise.

The final phase of the spiritual exercise concludes with a "colloquy", in which the meditator enters into a dialogue with the creator. God is addressed directly and is expected to reply; the colloquy is thus performed as a kind of role-play in which, for example, two friends may be chatting, or a servant seeking instruction from a master,

or a bride speaking with her husband (37). This practice, when translated into prose or verse, will naturally give rise to a “graceful familiarity” or “easy colloquial style” such as that Martz perceives in a transcribed meditation of Robert Southwell’s (29).

The exercise as a whole can be seen as corresponding to a threefold structure comprising composition, analysis, and colloquy. These constituent phases, moreover, correspond to the three “powers” of the soul, namely the acts of memory, understanding, and will (or affections). Marts identifies, albeit contentiously, the influence of the Ignatian ternary form in “at least four” (49) of Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*, with the additional observation that “more often we should expect the poetry to reflect chiefly the final stages of the sequence” in which the three powers or acts of the soul “fuse, become incandescent” (46). Such a fusing is evident, Marts argues, in Donne’s “subtle theological analysis, punctuated with passionate questions and exclamations” (47). In addition to his readings of the *Holy Sonnets*, which are by no means accepted universally, Marts looks at “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward” and devotes an entire chapter to the *Anniversaries*.

Rather conveniently, Marts brings us back almost to where we started in the introduction to Part I by quoting the following passage from Yeats’s *Autobiography* which makes use of theatrical terms (as Yeats was fond of doing) to summarise the correspondence between meditative discipline and creative imagination.

There is a relation between discipline and the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. (Marts 321-2)

Thus far I have only been concentrating on influences upon Donne, either inherently dramatic in themselves or constitutive of the poet’s dramatic temperament or disposition. Those influences which are dramatic in themselves obviously include the actual influence of the theatre, for which several of the critics discussed above argue. What has not yet been considered, however, is the possibility that Donne himself had an influence upon the theatre. That at least two critics have noted such a possibility dictates its inclusion here in the name of thoroughness. Moreover, the reciprocity of such a notion, albeit difficult to validate, is appealing to this study which is, of course, predicated upon a principle of inversion and inference: namely, that Donne is to be considered dramatic first and foremost because it has become a critical convention to call him so.

William Minto, writing in 1880, is something of an exception among nineteenth-century critics insofar as he is concerned with the neglect of Donne’s poetry.

The following passage shows that Minto considers Donne's style, a development of the style of the Court, to be a direct influence on the dramatists of the time.

His poetry was really a sort of departure in the trifling style. And before we condemn the style of the Court, with its absurd ingenuities, its far-fetched conceits, its passion for saying only what had never been said before, as mere trifling and waste of brains, we must remember what the great poetry of the stage owed to it. The ransacking of heaven and earth for occult images, the elaborate torture with which these images were twisted and turned and broken into fragments, the indefatigable manipulation of words and ideas – all this belonged to the intense occupation of the best intellect of the time with the materials of poetry. The labour was not thrown away. The great masters of the dramatic art were gainers by it. Dr Johnson admits that the rubbish heaps of the metaphysical poets contained many things that "might be useful to those who know their value". . . . The dramatic literature might have been still nobler without it; but without it this literature might never have existed, and the stage might have remained what it was before Marlowe descended to rescue it from clownish horseplay, bustling spectacle, and the crude representation of sensational incidents. (Smith and Phillips 6).

Similarly, the following extract from an anonymous review of Grierson's edition entitled "John Donne, the Elizabethan", published in *Nation* 15 February 1913, actually has John Webster filching ideas from a John Donne who could have easily been the model for Hamlet.

At length we are beginning . . . to note the limits and nature of the short period when the Elizabethans found their highest expression – a period whose spirit is almost completely the spirit of Donne. For the drama, the crown of the time, was at its best for little more than a decade. Between, roughly, 1598 and 1613, all the dramatists were doing their best work. The spirit of power came upon them startlingly. . . . One must understand this period, his background, to understand Donne. The soul of its art was the soul of his. Webster repeatedly steals from his published poems. . . . Hamlet, with his bitter flashes, his humor, his metaphysical inquisitiveness, and his passion, continually has the very accent of the secular Donne; but that he is an avenger, not a lover. To Ophelia he must have been Donne himself. Indeed, Donne, the bulk of whose good poetry seems to have been written between 1595 and 1613, heralded, and in some part led, this age, when English literature climbed and balanced briefly on the difficult pinnacle of sincerity. Poetry is always a few years ahead of drama. But Donne applied the same spirit the dramatists applied to the whole world, almost solely to love. He is, for width and depth, incomparably the greatest love-poet in English. . . . He belonged to an age when men were not afraid to mate their intellects with their emotions. In his own words he "loved to be subtle to plague himself". (Smith 1975 353-4)

Some of the above assertions no doubt seem a little far-fetched.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is certain that Donne was influential during his lifetime; it is not, therefore, unreasonable to imagine that he had some effect on writers of verse drama. In "Donne and the Poetry of Today" George Williamson similarly attempts to specify Donne's influence upon his contemporaries and successors: "We should remember that Donne's influence in the

<sup>2</sup> Webster, for example, does not repeatedly steal or even extensively borrow from Donne.

seventeenth century was primarily a technical influence. . . . Donne was the great innovator, a great experimenter in form and style, but chiefly a great explorer of the poetic mind" (Spencer 156).

Finally, I want to return to the notion that the dramatic Donne perceived by an array of twentieth-century critics is a phenomenon created to fulfil a need. In this sense he may be perceived as doubly dramatic, like an actor sought to play a dramatic role that can only be fulfilled by a dramatic persona such as he, the actor himself, possesses. Rightly or wrongly, then, Donne was "type-cast" by critics in the early twentieth century, a time that was, like Donne's own time, an age of anxiety, apparent in both history books and works of literary commentators such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and W.H. Auden.<sup>3</sup> The main sources of that anxiety, moreover, are paralleled by three of the major forms of influence on Donne's dramatic identified in the preceding pages: the psychological, the historical, and the spiritual. Each of these aspects of western civilisation was in a state of crisis in the early twentieth century. This climate of social turmoil can be linked to some extent to the intellectual heritage of Freud, Marx, and Darwin respectively, although these revolutionary thinkers are, of course, themselves merely commentators on perceived historical shifts rather than the authors thereof.

To the young Eliot in particular Donne must have seemed remarkably modern, so much so that Jonson, had he still been around, would have been forced to eat his famous words. Donne does not perish in the least for being too difficult; rather, it is that very complexity coupled with a "sensuous apprehension of thought" that brings about his revival. Eliot, whose more immediate influences were the French symbolist poets Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière (Eliot himself, incidentally, cherished aspirations as a verse dramatist), echoes that point in "The Metaphysical Poets":

It is not a permanent necessity that poets should be interested in philosophy, or in any other subject. We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (289)

It is apparent, then, that Donne appears dramatic to critics in the twentieth century in ways that are not directly linked with drama. Indeed, there is no great abundance of overt references to the theatre in his work. Rather, it would seem, the epithet encapsulates the nature of the early twentieth century, which in turn has much in common with Donne's age, an age whose spirit is portrayed vividly, dramatically in his verse.

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<sup>3</sup> See Mario Praz's "Seventeenth-Century Metaphysical poetry" in Roberts, ed. *Essential Articles for the Study of John Donne* (7).

On the subject of later twentieth-century commentators on Donne, I shall conclude this chapter with a discussion of one writer from that period who, like myself, has found it useful to organise his material into a tripartite system of categories. Indeed, the sub-title of John Carey's *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1981) delineates such an organisation of material. I suggest, moreover, that the category I have called *influence* corresponds more or less to Carey's "life" and "mind", while *effect* and *response* relate similarly to Carey's "art". Carey's book is immensely readable but his treatment of its subject is in many ways a product of the twentieth-century critical enterprise that has made a cult of Donne (Leishman's influence is especially evident), one of the underpinning assumptions of which—the idea that Donne is especially dramatic—has also been the incentive for embarking upon this thesis. Carey's book is thus a case study in critical inference and reads not so much as a scholarly account of Donne but more as a novelistic, even cinematic, dramatisation. Consequently, it exemplifies and validates much of what I have argued about the way perceptions of Donne have been coloured by critical inference over the last hundred years.

In dramatising Donne, Carey gets good mileage out of the poet's apostasy, beginning his chapter on the subject with the following pithy dictum: "The first thing to remember about Donne is that he was a Catholic; the second, that he betrayed his faith" (15). Upon this premise Carey is able to construct the argument that "Donne was born into a terror, and formed by it" (18), and that, consequently, "[he] survives on the fringes of society, a master of back stairs and side alleys, hard-up, outcast, victorious. It was a fantasy life which had magnetic appeal for a young man who could see that English society had closed its ranks against his faith" (19). Like a Hollywood scriptwriter, Carey thus transforms Donne into an existential hero, a glamorous Hugoesque phantom. Throw in the angst of an ambitious temperament frustrated by a failed secular career, a disastrous marriage (279), and intermittent suicidal thoughts (55) and Carey now has all the ingredients for a psychological thriller of blockbuster proportion. The central character is made all the more interesting by his many quirky obsessions: with such diverse objects as angels, jellies, mandrakes, mummy, maps, shadows, sponges, coins, and candles (262-74 ff).

The material in the early part of Carey's book alternates between what I have called *influence* and *effect*. Chapters on the major factors influencing the poet's psychological profile—his apostasy and ambition respectively—are interspersed with others that trace these influences in his literary output. For Carey, then, Donne's writing was a kind of therapy that brought about its own anxieties. He seizes with glee on the notion of Donne's "contempt for poetry, and for himself in the role of poet" which forced him to lead "a double life, his poetry supplying a covert outlet for impulses which his public self refused to recognize" (70). Inner struggle is, not surprisingly, at the core of Carey's characterisation of Donne. From the influences of

character and circumstances, Carey depicts a persona that is “simultaneously dualistic and synthesizing”, displaying an “impulse to seek conjunction [of opposites], and . . . [a] hypersensitivity to division” (278). From this it becomes apparent that, for Carey, a key line from Donne’s own work that summarises his character is “Oh, to vex me, contraries meete in one”. Consequently, the poems themselves provide a playing space in which the synthesising duellist can act out his internal struggle: “They offer a private theatre in which unresolvable oppositions could be entertained as they could not in the decisive business of life” (46). Carey also emphasises Donne’s propensity for “self-dramatization”, a trait he associates with “egocentricity” (170), and an “obsession with self-analysis” (125). As part of this self-dramatization, Carey argues, Donne invented “two personalities, Jack Donne and Dr. Donne, which stabilized discordant tendencies in his make up” (170). The macabre culmination of Donne’s tendency to self-dramatise is his “stage-managing his own demise”, incorporating the deliberate “performance” of his last sermon and the self-conscious staging and acting out of his own death (170), which, Carey argues, was “typical of Donne’s determination to turn death into a drama of the will” (170).<sup>4</sup> As with the other commentators I have discussed, Carey’s use of theatrical terminology is conspicuous.

Carey’s categories of *life*, *mind*, and *art* impose, I suggest, a similar tripartite division upon Donne as those categories—*influence*, *effect*, and *response*—which I have perceived in the other critics surveyed, and it is interesting to note that both structures present a dramatised but only at best semi-coherent image of Donne. Carey’s Donne is of the species of heroically complex characters that inspire film-makers, but one wonders how accurate a picture of the real man it is. Focusing upon the historical, political, and spiritual forces that shaped the psyche of its subject, Carey’s account privileges, along with the other writers discussed above, the aspect of the dramatic in Donne that I have called *influence*. In many respects, moreover, Carey serves to typify and summarise the views of those other commentators.

In conclusion, then, the purpose of this chapter has been to establish what, if anything, is significant about the application by critics in the twentieth century of the epithet “dramatic” with respect to proposed influences that may have shaped the work of John Donne. The literature surveyed shows a degree of variation in the use of the term, which is to be expected. I suggest, however, that totally conflicting theories do not really arise to the extent that they will in the following chapter on dramatic “effect”. Rather, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the thoughts presented above outline several key areas of influence that make us want to call Donne dramatic.

The first area is psychological and is a development of the notion of either a conflict or conflation of thought and feeling that we saw introduced by Coleridge and

<sup>4</sup> See Laurence Houseman’s dramatic dialogue “The Mortuary”, which is a dramatisation of Donne’s enigmatic death (*Cornered Poets* 237-56).



Yeats. For Grierson, conflict between feeling and intellect is balanced by a blend of imagination and emotion. Inner divisions between feeling, intellect, and fancy, however, are ultimately undermined by a “complexity of moods” and the inner struggle is relocated to an external, existential plane where it takes place between the aspirations of the individual will and harsh reality of human limitations. Leishman perceives in Donne “the dialectical expression of personal drama”. This arises from a tendency in Donne toward morbidity and scepticism that leads to a kind of escapism through the playing out of a psychodrama involving fictional situations and *dramatis personae* that allow the poet to retain an element of detachment and privacy appropriate to his brooding and introspective disposition. The category of psychological influence also provides a figurative sense in which Donne may be said to be dramatic, insofar as the preceding sentences, for example, suggest that Donne the poet is “like an actor, playing many parts”, or that Donne the man was often “an actor without a part”.

Historical influences on the shaping of Donne’s dramatic are proposed by Cruttwell, Gardner, Warnke, Martz, Grierson and Eliot. Most notable is the tendency to associate the poetry of Donne with contemporary dramatic verse. This association can only be discussed in terms of the purported effects of such an influence—colloquial diction, everyday situations, Aristotelian tripartite structure, the play-like autonomy of individual poems—and will therefore be covered in the next chapter. Radical transformation of literary and poetic convention is another aspect of a period in history generally associated with intense social and political transformation as the feudal heritage of the Middle Ages finally gave way entirely to the modern era and the dominance of the metropolis. A propensity for sudden transition together with the likelihood of elements of surprise and danger suggest that there was certainly something very dramatic about the times, and it is natural that such a *Zeitgeist* should be reflected in the better literary artefacts of those times.

Meditative exercises seem an unlikely model for a verse style that is in any way dramatic. Yet in proposing such a model, Martz combines the historical and psychological aspects of influence. Indeed, he provides a further category: spiritual influence, or the influence of spiritual practice. The contemplative dramatisation that is an intrinsic part of the Ignatian method would, of course, be well known to Donne, who was raised in a recusant Catholic family with strong Jesuit affiliations. Moreover, it is a contemplative sensibility that, hand in hand with a healthy dose of phenomenological scepticism, lends credibility to the *theatrum mundi* topos that, Warnke insists, was predominant in the age of Donne, and that I will use in Parts II and III to inform my own interpretation of the dramatic in Donne’s poetry.

## Chapter Two

### Effect

In this chapter I shall be looking at the kinds of features that certain commentators have perceived as dramatic in Donne's work. Some of these involve techniques and stylistic devices borrowed directly from dramaturgy while others have a more figurative association with the epithet. Indeed, it should be considered that the application of the term to anything other than features of actual drama is largely metaphorical. This in turn suggests that the terminology of poetry is somehow insufficient to represent all possible poetic effects, or at least that it is a natural tendency to use figurative language to describe poetry. So appears to be the case with fiction, which may be considered dramatic in a number of ways. Familiarity with the ways in which the term is understood by one eminent writer on the subject therefore provides a suitable beginning to this chapter in which I shall also consider critical attempts to challenge the notion that Donne is dramatic in any consistently meaningful or significant respect.

In order to elucidate the potential ambiguity of the term "dramatic" as it applies to Donne in particular, Pierre Legouis, in his 1928 book *Donne the Craftsman*, notes:

That Donne possessed dramatic power has generally been acknowledged. Indeed one of the generation which came to manhood in the last decade of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century might be credited with some measure of the instinct at work in Shakespeare and so many lesser playwrights, even before he had given evidence of it. (47)

Legouis mentions Donne's reputation as a playgoer in his early manhood, qualifying the cliché with the observation that "the theatres probably found in him a hard patron to please; and even in his sermons he will not boggle at comparisons drawn from play-acting" (47-8). He also mentions several explicit references to the theatre in Donne's poetry, in Elegy [XVI] "On his Mistris", one of the *Holy Sonnets* ("This is my playes last scene"), and two verse letters "To Sir Henry Wotton" ("Here's no more news" and "Sir, more than kisses") and a verse letter addressed to Donne by William Cornwaleys in 1600, which contains the lines "If then for change of howers you seem careles / Agree with me to lose them at the Playes". Also, in a footnote, Legouis quotes Edward Dowden from *New Studies in Literature* (1895): "Touches of dramatic power are rare in Donne, whose genius was lyrical and meditative, not that of a dramatist; but in this Elegy there is one touch which might seem of triumphant power if it had occurred in a tragedy by Webster". The passage Dowden has in mind is towards the end of Elegy [XVI] "On his Mistris" and begins "nor in bed fright thy Nurse / With midnights startings"(49-50); he comments, "[t]he passage is very beautiful and moving but it is

not strictly dramatic since the lover merely conjures up a vision of the future as in 'The Apparition'" (Dowden 103; quoted in Legouis 47n).

Legouis notes that "general agreement upon the epithet "dramatic" rather tends to confusion than enlightenment because no two critics seem to understand it in the same sense, and it may well be applied to Donne's poetry in more than one" (48). Legouis proceeds to suggest three definitions. The first meaning of "dramatic" is tantamount to "pictorial" (49) and is associated with "what stirs the emotions through the sight, especially, of attitudes and gestures" (48). This sense of the term is best exemplified, he suggests, by "The Apparition" with its "sordid but striking *mise-en-scène*" (48), although he also notes that there is no action as such in the poem and suggests that "[s]uch art is less akin to the drama than to the *tableau vivant*, be it said without a sneer" (49).

The second proposed sense of "dramatic" is "purely psychological" (49), of which Legouis writes the following:

This amounts to saying that the soul of Donne in his lyrics divides against itself as, for instance, that of Othello in Shakespeare's play. But owing to the assumed identity of author and character, this is just a roundabout way of stating the theory of the poet's unqualified earnestness. Art, if it exists at all in the eyes of such criticism, is strictly subordinate to thought and feeling, feeling instinct with thought, or thought quickened by feeling. (49)

And, in a third sense,

in many of the *Songs and Sonets* there are two characters; the second indeed a mute; or rather his words are not written down; but we are enabled to guess how he acts and what he would say if he were granted utterance. The way in which Donne gives us those hints is both very clever and very modern. More important still from the point of view adopted in this essay is the effect produced on the speaking character by the presence of a listening one, whom he tries to persuade and win over. What seemed at first disinterested dialectics, indulged in for truth's sake, or at least as "evaporations" of wit, sounds quite differently when the reader realises this dumb presence. (50)

Legouis adds that he finds no real instances of actual dialogue in Donne, and that certain of the *Songs and Sonets* (the four Valedictions, "Song: Sweetest, I love do not go", "Break of Day", "The Sunne Rising", and "The good-morrow") are "dramas of the simplest kind" (51). "The good-morrow", he argues,

succeeds in creating a voluptuous atmosphere and calling up in it two flesh-and-blood human beings who act in relation to each other. The impression of passionate reality made upon the reader results partly from the poet's artfully concealed art, an art which is nothing if not dramatic. (54)

Legouis is cautious about applying the epithet to any of these poems without qualification, for "it might be objected that they lack progression: the situation and even

the feelings are at the end what they were at the beginning” (54). Having entered this caveat, however, Legouis suggests that in certain of the *Songs and Sonets* “Donne’s technique shows itself more complex: the initial situation evolves more or less, there are episodes and vicissitudes, or at least development” (54). These episodic poems are “Song: Sweetest love, I do not go”, “The Canonization”, “The Extasie”, “The Prohibition”, and the two poems which, Legouis believes, “exhibit Donne’s dramatic art in its most complex form” (72): namely, “The Flea” and “The Dreame”.

Legouis observes when discussing “The Extasie” that “Donne is no poet of nature; his proper study is man; even when he for once lays the scene of his action outdoors, his metaphors take us back to the boudoir or the rake’s den” (62). It is in terms of his definitions, moreover, of “dramatic” as the pictorial invocation of *mise-en-scène* and the “dumb presence” of a listening character that tangible effects may be perceived through textual analyses of individual poems.

Legouis’s comparison of Donne with Shakespeare directs our attention to several critics who identify the former’s affinity with verse drama as principally, although not exclusively, metrical in nature. One is C.A. Patrides, who considers that Donne’s originality is not, as often imagined, to be discerned in his use of idiomatically colloquial English, but rather that it resides in his idiosyncratic sense of accent and manipulation of metre “which alone is capable of conveying his stupendous range of tone” (20-1). Similar in roughness to that of late sixteenth-century satirists, Donne’s metre is also attributed by Patrides to the influence of the “variable cadences” provided by the Elizabethan dramatists (21). A debt to certain classical sources, all demonstrating a dialectical quality or “dramatic dimension” is also implicit:

These contexts [the influence of the Elizabethan dramatists and satirists, as well as the fact that some of Donne’s most celebrated images are borrowed from other non-dramatic poets] are indispensable for a full cognizance of “the moment”, and could profitably be amplified by studies of the dramatic dimension inherent in “dialogues” Platonic as well as Neoplatonic (Bembo, Leone Ebro, Castiglione, *et al.*) no less than Augustinian (in the *Confessions*) and eventually scientific too (in Galileo’s *Dialogues on the Two Great Systems of the World*, 1632).

As Patrides continues we can see that he considers the dramatic in Donne to be much more than just the echo of influence:

But details appertaining to the background do not necessarily clarify Donne’s achievement in the immediate foreground, *id est*, his introduction into lyric poetry of elements innate to dramatic literature, his boldness in adjusting those elements to his immediate purposes, his use of variable cadences to evoke diverse emotional states. (21)

Patrides cites Sir Richard Baker’s famous comment about Donne having been “a great frequenter of Plays” and challenges twentieth-century biographer R.C. Bald, who

finds that there are hardly any traces of dramatic influence to be found in Donne's work, with the retort: "Surely the *dramatic* nature of that work is trace enough" (21n). This dramatic nature is to be found principally, Patrides suggests, in Donne's "striking opening lines" which are matched only by those of Pope and Browning, and in whom they are seen as a direct source of inspiration.

The connection with Browning is extended by Patrides with regard to the concept of dramatic monologue: "We accept that Donne's poems are dramatic, more specifically dramatic monologues presupposing a listener. Each has in consequence its particular 'voice', its distinct narrator; and each, its own 'theatrical language'" (22). Patrides expands this assertion, noting that in addition to "the use of several distinct narrators who . . . include more than one woman", Donne's poems utilise this diversity of voices to "represent diverse and often conflicting attitudes"(25). The term "theatrical language" refers specifically to the metaphysical conceit, and Patrides draws from Eliot to assist in the further elaboration of such a connection:

The theatrical language encompasses the conceits, that is to say elaborate comparisons, extended analogies, or (in T.S. Eliot's phrase) 'distended metaphors and similes' [*Selected Essays* 220]. The operative words here are not the nouns but the adjectives ('elaborate', 'extended', 'distended') which suggest dimensions beyond mere similitudes. As Eliot further explained, a conceit is 'the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it' [262]. (22)

The "elements innate to dramatic literature" that Patrides perceives in Donne are metrical innovations, "rough cadences" that, he asserts, "taught generations of poets to look with their ears" (22). Such observations are corroborated by the following from another prominent critic, F.R. Leavis: "And there is, of course, about Donne's characteristic poetry—in the presentment of situations, the liveliness of enactment—something fairly to be called dramatic" (13). Leavis, like Patrides, is principally concerned with scansion, and he quotes *Satire III* (8-15), observing how Donne, "playing his scene-movement across the rimes, controls his tone and gets his key stresses, coming down with retarded emphasis on 'damn'd'" (13). Leavis discerns affinities with Shakespeare, despite the fact that Donne's poetry obviously does not confine itself to the pentametric line as does blank verse.

Similar observations regarding Donne's use of meter, comparison with dramatic monologue, and the theatricality of the metaphysical conceit are made by Hugh Kenner. Picking up on Baker's remark about Donne concerning neatness, ladies, plays, and conceited verse, Kenner proposes the following: "His playgoer's ear heard thousands upon thousands of verses tuned to the run of speech, and registered a hundred times the formal theatricalities that sustain, through incidents no matter how intolerably melodramatic, the continuity of copious language" (xv). Kenner then cites the opening

line of “The Canonization”, asserting that it “is not first of all iambic decasyllabic, but first of all a man speaking” (xvi). Of the first four lines of “The Apparition” he says “[t]his is imagined melodrama with the sting of live speech in it, transfiguring in the manner of the stage the routine desk-bound poets’ routine addresses to cruel ladies” (xvi). Elegy [XVI] “On is Mistris” is described as “a dramatic monologue implying something like the plot of a fantastic play; for their relationship is secret, and he must go abroad, and must dissuade her from accompanying him disguised as his page”; the poem opens, moreover, “with the tolling formality of a dramatic set piece” (xvi).

Kenner makes the following, compelling appeal to the appropriateness in Donne’s age of the *theatrum mundi* motif:

In a time of public pageantry, public violence, and gratuitous disaster, a time, moreover, in which the overwhelming realities pertained unquestionably to the soul’s other world, it was natural to feel all this world as a stage, and so to receive from whatever stuff players might enact a sense not of fantasy but of familiar experience heightened, lurid though the plots might be, excessive though the language. A sensibility trained on drama in such a time ranged readily over every order of happening, finding nothing strange. (xvi-xvii)

Kenner quotes the passage from the beginning of the “Second Anniversary” (9-18) depicting a public execution by beheading, claiming that Donne “presents us with a scene exceeding Webster” (xvii). Moreover, he links the *theatrum mundi* topos with the metaphysical conceit:

Yet this was not a literary fancy but something everyone had seen enacted more than once in the London daylight: in fact a wordless play, a ritual death, a public drama mounted on official boards. And almost casually Donne imposes on it another drama, the crossing of the Red Sea to the promised land; and does not fail to note that here there are two Red Seas. This is the famous “conceit,” which came to be thought of as his trademark: the remorselessly logical handling of the interrelations between image and theme. It is a “conceit” because not plainly seen but by ingenuity conceived; and the style came at last to be called “metaphysical” because of its logic’s quality, moving with persuasive or merely fantastic force among unrealities. (xvii)

According to the above passage we can now identify certain technical manifestations of what is claimed to be dramatic in Donne: metrical innovations and “rough cadences” that are typically exemplified by many of his opening lines, techniques found in dramatic monologue that presuppose a listener and invite comparisons of Donne with Browning, and a diversity of voices that are complemented by the “theatrical language” of ingenious extension that is a key feature of the metaphysical conceit, and the affinity of the conceit with the *theatrum mundi* topos.

Before proceeding to a discussion of critics who have applied such observations to specific poems, however, it is necessary to consider two articles that constitute something of a negative hypothesis of the dramatic in Donne. Yet rather than being

antagonistic to the aims of this study, these two papers are both useful and readily assimilated into the other positive ideas presented. Both written in the 1960s, they are, I suggest, genuflective reactions to mainstream critical culture in the wake of Eliot and the New Critics respectively, which had made Donne a cult figure, celebrating him *ad nauseum* as the “ideal poet”, to the point of excluding from the critical spotlight many others worthy of scholarly attention. The fact that these two writers, Harris and Chari, choose to challenge the notion of the dramatic in Donne is an oblique way of challenging all those who sought to elevate Donne’s status earlier in the twentieth century, for, as I have attempted to demonstrate, that elevation and the use of the epithet “dramatic” go hand in hand.

In a 1962 article entitled “John Donne and the Theatre”, Victor Harris challenges earlier twentieth-century critics such as Eliot, Grierson, and Cruttwell who predicate an association of Donne with the theatre based on Baker’s “great frequenter of Playes”. Harris’s essay is to be commended for its empirical approach; indeed, he is the only critic discussed in this part of the study apart from Legouis who focuses upon actual allusions to the theatre in Donne’s work. Besides identifying numerous theatrical references in Donne’s poetry, sermons and private letters, Harris notes personal connections with the stage in the persons of John and Jasper Heywood, Donne’s grandfather and uncle respectively, and Edward Alleyn, his son-in-law (259-60). John Heywood had been a court musician and writer of interludes, Jasper Heywood translated a number of Senacan tragedies. Edward Alleyn was an actor and theatrical entrepreneur who allegedly retired as a performer after the infamous “one devell too many” incident during a performance of Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* in which he was taking part (see p.76n).

Harris’s argument hinges on the assertion “that Donne rejects the theatre, both public and private, and that he was never truly at home there even in his youth” (258). This opinion is derived from the fact that Donne, when he refers to the theatre, often does so in a derogatory manner, highlighting the pretence and illusion of the drama and mocking or condemning both players and audiences alike. This is equally true of Donne the preacher as it is of Donne the poet. Moreover, Donne’s alleged contempt for the theatre purportedly stems from an underlying contempt for the real world that it imitates, and Harris refuses even to allow that Donne appreciates the former in such an imitative capacity: “What he sees with his terrible clarity is the theatre’s illusion as no more than the most ironic and ludicrous face of the world’s illusion” (269).

If Harris’s claims are to be taken seriously, then, I suggest, we should expect to see no references to theatre at all in Donne, for that would be a true rejection of the subject. For even should it be accepted that Donne’s use of theatrical allusions are generally negative, this does not constitute a rejection on the level that Harris is proposing. Donne’s use of theatrical imagery may not be so prevalent as to warrant

Cruttwell's claim that the image of the play is as natural a metaphor for Donne as it is for Shakespeare; but such imagery is included, not rejected, and has to be counted as one of Donne's sources of poetic effect. To conclude that Donne is not dramatic because he uses theatrical references that do not show that he personally enjoyed theatre-going would be fallacious, and, admittedly, this is not quite what Harris is saying. As I have suggested, he is challenging Cruttwell's notion of a "moment of convergence" as well as Eliot's of a "unification of sensibility" that played so big a part in establishing the cult of Donne. What Harris picks on specifically, however, is Cruttwell's assertion that Donne enjoyed "a deep and lively experience of the theatre", possibly because he has noticed, although he does not say so, just how often the term "dramatic" has been used to describe a poet he feels has received far too much praise and attention, rather like a theatrical prima donna, over several decades prior to the publication of his article.

V.K. Chari's "The Dramatic in Donne" (1965) is, like Harris's "Donne and the Theatre", a determined effort to counter the claims of those critics who regard Donne's work as distinctly or especially dramatic. The central concern of the essay is to sound a warning against the dangers of exaggeration and reductivism in applying such an epithet. Unfortunately, however, the argument is based on prescriptive notions of what constitutes dramaticity that are often unclear and remain by-and-large unsubstantiated. Furthermore, Chari seems unable to decide whether this stance should be based on differences of degree or of kind. At times it is argued that aspects of Donne's technique which at first glance appear worthy of the epithet are more rightly to be regarded as essentially non-dramatic or anti-dramatic; elsewhere, when a degree of dramaticity is acknowledged, it will be systematically dismissed as a definitive feature through comparisons with other supposedly *even more* dramatic writers, in particular, Browning. Similarly, and not without contradiction, dramatic elements in the poems are disregarded on the grounds that they are not sustained throughout the entire corpus, while it is simultaneously maintained that other dramatic qualities, such as variety of mood, can only be appreciated in terms of the canon as a whole, and therefore fail to establish a truly dramatic dynamics in any of the individual poems.

One of the central premises of Chari's essay is an alleged mutually exclusive polarity between the dramatic and the rhetorical, or, using alternative terms, between performance and persuasion. Donne's poetry, it is maintained, fails to fulfil promises of dramatic momentum because it lapses into mere argument. Even the speaking voice, which Chari, like Cruttwell, considers the most dramatic element in the poems, is regarded as subservient to the presentation of a rhetorical argument, which betrays the presence of an essentially conventional and formulaic (and therefore non-dramatic) motive for its deployment. Cruttwell's observation of Aristotelian structures is similarly dismissed in the belief that they, too, serve logical, deductive ends, rather than



signalling evidence of transformational dramatic momentum. The settings of the poems, too, though often vivid, are considered mere backdrops or vehicles for essentially rhetorical enterprises.

The universality of characterisation and dramatic situation that Cruttwell considers evidence of the dramatic nature of the poems is, for Chari, quite the contrary: the situations are considered merely general, providing only the indefinite occasions required for musing or dramatic address, which owes nothing to drama but rather exemplifies a formulaic and lyrical heritage that may be traced back to Ovid and Horace. The same contention is levelled at the characters: the speaker is always a general type and his addressee a mere foil; neither can properly be considered “a dramatic character understood as a particular individual engaged in a given action” (22). There is no evidence in the essay, however, to support any of these criteria as indispensable even in generic drama; they only serve to display an arbitrary preference for a certain kind of objective realism and an associated roundness of character. More importantly, the essay also shows a tendency towards proclamation of the truism that Donne’s work is not “dramatic” because it is not “drama”, which is, of course, absurd, lapsing into the kind of reductivism the essay claims to redress.

For Chari, then, it is only valid to consider Donne dramatic insofar as he is neither lyrical nor autobiographical. Perhaps the greatest weakness of this essay is that, while it remains unashamedly a sustained attack on the views of Cruttwell and other commentators, it nonetheless makes the same assumption as Cruttwell, in privileging the notion that inward psychological action is essentially more dramatic than the outwardly focused dynamics of interpersonal relations. Chari dismisses the “centrifugal” momentum Cruttwell perceives in Donne as evidence of a rhetorical rather than dramatic motivation for utterance (28). Both critics share, ironically, a rather solipsistic concept of what it means to be dramatic. Yet despite the flimsiness of some of his arguments, Chari provides us with a comprehensive catalogue of dramatic elements in Donne’s work that call for a more inductive, less predetermined analysis, namely: situation, setting, characterisation, the speaking voice, portrayal of moods, psychological analysis, *in media res* and *coup de théâtre* techniques, Aristotelian tripartite structuring, and the formal implications of the metaphysical conceit.

Having considered the challenges of Harris and Chari to the notion of the dramatic in Donne, I shall now look at four critics who argue for the presence of dramatic technique in Donne’s *Songs and Sonets*, *Elegies*, *Satires*, *Sermons*, and *Holy Sonnets* respectively: Nahdi, Lauritsen, Harland, and Albrecht.

Salah Nahdi’s article “John Donne’s Love Lyrics: A Study in Dramatic Style” (1975) contends that Donne’s poetic achievement is that he “revived the whole decayed set-up of Elizabethan love poetry with a technique which is essentially dramatic” (67). In contrast to Chari, who maintains that there is a fundamental incompatibility between

the dramatic and the rhetorical, Nahdi argues that Donne's *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets* display a dramatic quality inasmuch as they successfully conflate hypothetical argument with the quotidian and colloquial, somehow remaining tethered to "the anchor of reality" no matter how outrageous the conceit. For Nahdi, Donne's poetics comprises the translation of logic—the progression of thought—into a concrete situation with an identifiable human presence. Such a transformation arises from the implementation of an "artfully concealed art" that has something in common with the illusions of the dramaturge, and Nahdi terms the overall process "a construction of involvement" (74).

While Nahdi's model places the abstract, logical elements of the poetry in a position subordinate to the more concrete elements of situation and character, the thought processes portrayed have nonetheless an interactive relationship with such tangible elements as rhythm, modulation, and formal structure. Transitional moments in the speaker's developing thoughts are often emphasised by "obstructive techniques" that impede the metric flow of the verse to suggest a personal, emotional involvement that Nahdi terms the "rhetoric of the familiar style" (73). Like Cruttwell, Nahdi often perceives an Aristotelian tripartite structure in the poems delineating discrete sections that correspond to specific dramatic constituents: namely, induction, reversal, and discovery.

A break with Elizabethan convention is observed by Nahdi in the notion that the verse is not "sung" but "spoken", and that its denotations tend to be prosaic and literal rather than allusive. These qualities are evident, he contends, in the large proportion of lines that are not end-stopped or semantically self-contained. As for the characterisation of the speakers in the poems, Nahdi argues that they can be identified with the poet himself while also displaying a dramatically impersonal quality: they simultaneously portray John Donne in love along with the "different voices" of the lover in every man (or Everyman). Whereas Chari considers it a sign of essentially non-dramatic dynamics that the speakers tend often to lapse into intellectual argument, for Nahdi this is part of the dramatic characterisation of the speaker that is often a vehicle for complementary elements such as humour. The suggestion that the speaker may be trying to "make her [the addressee] laugh secretly at his too intellectual method of seduction" (68) also offers an apposite counter to Chari's curious claim that many of Donne's poems are not to be considered dramatic because they are insufficiently serious. Moreover, the female addressee of the love poetry has an immediate, vocative presence that supersedes the apostrophised absence typical of the idealised ladies addressed by earlier sonneteers. Donne's women are directly addressed, and this technique gives rise to a sense of presence that creates the illusion of personal interaction, making the female role more than a mere foil for the masculine speaker. The immediacy conveyed by such a register is compounded by indeterminate yet somehow vividly dramatic details of setting, such

as the simple and oblique while at the same time transcendental reference in "The good-morrow" to "one little roome" (11)

Nahdi's understanding of Donne's dramaticity effectively undermines Chari's warning against the dangers of exaggeration inherent in such a concept. The essay confines itself to the secular love poetry while emphasising that Donne is dramatic in the sense of Elizabethan rather than modern naturalistic drama. This qualification stems from the observation that the poet "reconciles the claims of the universal and the particular, combining narrative with the purely dramatic" (76). Nahdi also acknowledges that the dramatic discovery may sometimes be arrived at through interpersonal action and, at other times, through self-reflexive psychological processes. Unlike either Chari or Cruttwell, however, Nahdi does not privilege the latter mode, arguing that the best work is to be found in what are termed the "I-thou" poems, in which dramatic momentum is achieved through a continual interplay between the speaker and addressee, who are not only interactive but also interdependent.

The second of the critics who argue for the presence of dramatic technique in Donne, John R. Lauritsen, claims in a 1976 article that the rough style of Donne's *Satires*, often defying attempts at scansion and thus causing these five significant and provocative poems to be overlooked, is an integral part of the textual enactment of a "drama of self-discovery". Observing the poems' reluctance to conform to "copybook metrical perfection", Lauritsen claims that the "tortured verse . . . mirrors exactly the torment not only of a mind which perceives a fallen world . . . but also of a mind which is deeply uncertain of its relationship to the evils of that world [and] profoundly riddled with anxiety" (118-19). A literary style that is inseparable from meaning aptly enacts the "moral paradox" that Lauritsen believes is central to the *Satires*: the idea that "it is only by recognizing and accepting one's fallen state that one can begin to rise above it" (130). Moreover, the presumption of moral superiority on the part of the speaker in the first four *Satires* is precisely what precludes the self-knowledge needed to initiate remedial correction.

For Lauritsen, then, the *Satires* portray a progress toward self-discovery within the domain of a moral conflict between the pure and virtuous soul and the grossly carnal body. It is claimed that these poems share an even greater affinity with Browning's dramatic monologues than that which has sometimes been perceived in Donne's love poetry. This claim rests on the notion that the *Satires* reveal more about their speaker(s) than their subjects: the first four "depend upon dramatic irony, upon our perception of the speaker's unconscious or preconscious relationship with his subject" (121), while in the fifth the speaker becomes self-aware, and thereby aware of the ambiguous "interdependence and essential oneness of humanity, especially a fallen humanity" (130).

This notion of an essential oneness is, according to Lauritsen, prefigured to an extent in *Satire I*, where a “heated exchange between two separate and distinct individuals” (121) gives way to an awareness of the speaker’s bond with his companion, the young rake, who is hitherto perceived as an “ostensible antagonist” to the protagonist’s “self-image or ego”. The I-thou relationship breaks down, as does the opposition of the spatial metaphors of the private chamber as the domain of the soul and the street as the infernal domain of the body. The theme of *Satire II*, Lauritsen claims, is the “perforation of the word” (123) and “subversion of Providence” (124) by Coscus, a poet-turned-lawyer, and the subject if not the addressee of the speaker’s utterance. Lauritsen regards this poem as curious for the fact that the speaker seeks exculpation even in the absence of an accusation. He considers *Satire III* the darkest of the five poems, despite the fact that it is normally read as a positive affirmation of the quest for true religion and a plea for religious tolerance. He argues that this surface largesse belies the fact that the speaker’s world-view, and hence his self-esteem, have broken down to the point where the only possible conciliation for the spiritual seeker can be found in the idea that “the quest itself, rather than the end of the quest, has become, in this fallen world, the only attainable objective” (126). *Satire IV* portrays the Court as “the nadir of the moral world” (127) and presents a speaker who attempts to eschew personal responsibility in the name of destiny. Thus elevated by what Lauritsen terms his “any-port-in-a-storm logic”, the speaker is set to launch into his attack against his subject, a “fallen and faded fop” (127). What develops, though, according to Lauritsen, is a merging of identity between the speaker and his subject, resulting in a “harrowing double vision” where the “satiric spy is also the spied” (128-9).

If the first four of the Satires hint at the recognition of the “self as co-partner in . . . [a] corrupt world” (129) *Satire V* is the only truly corrective poem, Lauritsen argues, and thereby the only one that fulfils the generic criteria of the satirical mode. Yet the poem bears distinctly anti-satiric traits: Lauritsen notes that the speaker does not begin by presuming moral superiority but with pleas for pity and compassion. The speaker discovers humanity in a corrupt world, and this is only possible after having owned to one’s part in that corruption. The great inhibitor of self-knowledge is denial, and self-knowledge is the only way to redemption. The progress toward self-discovery is, as Lauritsen suggests, a drama because it is enacted by human agents engaged, often unwittingly, in the excruciating process of finding a resolution to a conflict.

Paul W. Harland’s article “Dramatic Technique and Personae in Donne’s Sermons” (1986) proposes that in the sermons Donne makes use of a “dramatic homiletic” (709) to emulate what he perceives to be the fundamental nature of God, and to emphasise the dynamic aspect of biblical passages. These dramatic effects are achieved, Harland argues, through the preacher’s use of personae and (implied)

dialogue. The result is an enactment of an existential journey in which the imperative is to transform one's nature in a process of evolution toward a desired object.

The adoption of personae or voices by the preacher is used, Harland claims, to reflect the level of spiritual development addressed by the sermon, as well as to have an intentional effect on the auditor. Harland calls this technique "imagistic promoting", in which the auditor is persuaded to make a "regenerate response" in the form of an active imitation of God. This enactment is initiated by the auditor being invited to partake in the performance of a homiletic practice, which often makes "homeopathic" use of its subject matter, such as the adoption of a melancholic persona to help the auditor transcend the melancholy of daily life, for example.

Donne's sermons make significant use of the first person, Harland claims, in order "to advance the psychological action at critical junctures by representing growth in individuals through a speaking voice" (716). Characters may be real historical persons, scriptural figures (including Christ), or archetypal penitents and other aggregate personae. Discursive interpolations by the preacher introduce a dialectic, catechismal element. The seeming immediacy of the first person persona is also useful, Harland suggests, for establishing the speaker's dramatic relation with the scene through realistic detail in descriptions of "emblematic tableaux and stage settings" (723).

Meanwhile, the creative potential of second person address is utilised in the form of implied dialogue. Harland argues that this technique has much in common with dramatic monologue, with the persona often emerging through an address to a fictional listener, or even an individual member of the congregation. Prayers, too, fall into this category, in which God himself is the "ideal silent listener". Harland views the second person implied dialogue as a "model of growth" because the interactive dynamic of conversation makes it a perfect vehicle to reflect the negotiable and sometimes doubt-ridden momentum of "an evolving relationship with God" (723).

Harland's argument centres around the notion that Donne's utilisation of a variety of "homiletic personae" is based on an innate awareness of "the individual styles and stances that make up providential history" (724). God's ways are revealed, then, through the actions of individual characters chosen to portray both the "types and antitypes of Christ" (724). Blessed with an astute "ear for the diversity of biblical voices" (725), Donne as preacher-cum-actor is thereby confident that these "impersonations and voices, in whatever stage of their spiritual development, are capable of modelling the path to redemption" (725). Harland's perception of Donne's dramatic technique in the sermons is convincing precisely because of this focus on a transformational process that is realised through the enactment of individual stages within that process.

Roberta J. Albrecht's essay "Montage, *Mise en Scène*, and Miserable Acting: Feminist Discourse in Donne's *Holy Sonnet X*" (1992) postulates a cinematic aspect to

that poem (“Batter my heart, three person’d God”) and to the *Holy Sonnets* sequence as a whole. Using Patrick O’Connell’s model for successively ordering the allegedly original twelve of the nineteen poems, Albrecht suggests that the sequence can be seen as a kind of diptych in which six pairs of poems correspond in terms of theme and imagery. The sequence is perceived as cyclic—it is compared to a rosary—with *Sonnet I* (“Thou hast made me, And shall thy work decay”) corresponding to *Sonnet XII* (“Father, part of his double interest”), *Sonnet II* (“Oh my black Soule! now thou art summoned”) to *Sonnet XI* (“Wilt thou love God, as he thee!”), and so forth. According to Albrecht, this pairing of the poems traces a “vicious circle” that represents the aspirant’s failed attempt to proceed from the Last Judgement, the theme of the first six poems, to Atonement in the second six, only to end up back where he started, on Earth rather than in Heaven. Viewed thus, Albrecht claims, the sequence appears as a “gigantic chiasmus” in which each pair of poems displays a “correspondence of identity and/or opposition” (24).

Albrecht argues that such an arrangement of the poems is akin to the cinematic technique of *montage*. Unlike the more conventional *mise en scène* technique, where the narrative unfolds in chronological order, *montage* presents a fragmented narrative that Albrecht compares to cubist painting. Eisenstein, the first great employer of the technique, defines the term as a combination of two pictures to produce a tertiary effect representative of a more complex concept: a case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts thanks to the semiotics of dramatic juxtaposition, or, as Albrecht describes it, the “dialectic between adjacent shots” (28).

The notion of the poet as film-maker or dramatist gives rise to a number of general and specific observations by Albrecht apposite to a study of the dramatic in Donne. In general, Albrecht notes, the openings to the *Holy Sonnets* function like stage directions: the first lines set the scene, or (to extend the cinematic analogy) set up the camera for the opening shot. Albrecht refers to this as “lens activity”. It is also claimed that “Donne, as dramaturgist, is keenly aware of audience response, inviting his reader to participate actively in the process of making meaning” while “[t]he persona of the sonnets emulates his Lord, almost achieving his goal by means of a role-play” (31).

More specifically, Albrecht makes several observations regarding the proposed pairing of *Holy Sonnet III* (“This is my playes last scene”) with *Holy Sonnet X*, focusing on Donne’s use of theatre imagery and trans-gender role-play. The opening line of *Holy Sonnet III* shows the speaker taking on the persona of an actor on stage: “This is my plays last scene” functions as a metaphoric vehicle for “[t]he creature seeking purgation from the world/flesh/devil”. In *Holy Sonnet X* the theme becomes “[t]he creature seeking purgation and divorce from Satan’s bond” (24), which is represented by the speaker assuming a female role (28), a device also found in some of the secular poems. For Albrecht, the transvestite personae fails, as the poem’s often

spondaic metre betrays a “vertical, accentual, male voice [which] lurks behind the female voice, creating a kind of linguistic rape” (29). Despite this objection, and the assertion that the poem’s argument ultimately fails, Albrecht nonetheless credits Donne with having achieved a degree of subversive slippage, or *jouissance*, that suggests the bifurcation of male/female subjectivity within an ambiguous dialectic that is compared to musical counterpoint (29-30).

In this chapter I began by looking at how Legouis’s ways of perceiving the dramatic in Donne as pictorially evocative while implying the “dumb presence” of a listening character derive directly from tangible features of the texts. Patrides, Leavis, and Kenner identify aspects of Donne’s use of rhythm and meter that they associate with verse drama. The negative hypotheses of Harris and Chari fail to convince but nonetheless provide a useful catalogue both of Donne’s use of theatrical allusions and techniques respectively. Nahdi, Lauritsen, Harland, and Albrecht all provide studies that are built upon the notion of the presence of dramatic techniques in various works by Donne. For Nahdi this involves a combination of hypothetical argument, quotidian situations and colloquial speech, while Lauritsen perceives in the rough style of the *Satyres* a “drama of self-discovery”. Harland, by contrast, argues that in the sermons Donne achieves a “dramatic homiletic”, through the preacher’s use of personae and dialogue, while Albrecht observes in the *Holy Sonnets* quasi-cinematic techniques akin to *montage* and lens activity along with a dramatist’s keen awareness of audience response. In the next chapter I shall discuss, under the heading of dramatic *response*, critics who have considered such factors as Donne’s poetic audience, the role of the reader, and the poem as play script or screenplay.

### Chapter Three

#### Dramatic Response: Poetic Audience and the Role of the Reader

This chapter covers works of criticism that focus upon aspects of the dramatic in Donne that have less to do with the poet, his personality and his craft, or with the speakers and addressees in the poems, than with the notion of a poetic audience (or, with regard to the sermons, congregation). Such an approach, loosely affiliated with reader-response criticism, incorporates the concept of the reader playing an active role in the performance of the works and the notion of the text as play script, or, to continue Albrecht's cinematic analogy discussed in the last chapter, screenplay. The introduction of the reader into the creative process also gives rise to a "triangulation" of interpersonal dynamics between speaker, addressee, and reader/overhearer, that has been perceived in slightly different forms by several of the critics I shall cover. Before considering these, however, I shall look at a commentator who is concerned with the contemporary reading audience for whom Donne wrote as a strictly amateur, coterie poet.

Ted-Larry Pebworth adopts an approach to Donne's poetry, initiated in the 1980s by Arthur F. Marotti, that concentrates on the readership of the work during the poet's lifetime. Two essays, "John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance" (1989) and "The Early Audiences of Donne's Poetic Performances" (1996), in addition to offering a reader-response or reception-theory type reading, focus upon the specific social contexts in which the poems were created and circulated.

In the earlier of the two essays, Pebworth notes that eighty-six per cent of Donne's poetic output was written for manuscript and oral transmission only within a select and specific, though informal, group of readers, or coterie. Only seven poems, by contrast, were authorised by the poet for printing and subsequent circulation among a larger, more general readership. Pebworth argues that individual poems were written within a particular social context with a particular function or purpose in mind (71), such as the pursuit of advancement in the civil service during the early part of the reign of James I in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The poem thus bears more in common with a "performance script" than a "stable artefact", displaying a "flexibility and impermanence" that confounds modern notions of intellectual property. Although correct attribution was no doubt important initially, once the lyrical utterance had fulfilled its purpose it is as if it became the property of the coterie as a whole.

Pebworth is keen to emphasise the ephemeral nature of a poem transmitted in manuscript, as opposed to the definitive form and sense of authorial closure inherent in print culture. He perceives a variety of motives behind what he terms the "ethos of performance". One is a proudly non-professional, even flippant attitude towards writing



poetry typical of the young men of the Inns of Court. Another is the very expendability of the occasional poem, which may be cheerfully discarded once the occasion is past and the poem's purpose has been fulfilled. Because of this lack of interest in the preservation of the text, coterie poets are likened to *madonnari*: pavement artists whose works are quickly washed and scuffed away by rainwater and the feet of passers-by respectively. Pebworth suggests that this expendable quality lends the poems a dramatic spontaneity and the dynamism of conflict, as Donne indulges his "penchant for bravura, virtuosic performance" (65). It is also noted that Donne rarely appeals to the transcendence of poetry in the manner of the eternising conceit; when he uses tropes incorporating literary vehicles they are more likely to express a more immediate social aspect (72).

Pebworth also explores the textual implications of the poems' expendability, asserting the difficulty of identifying authentic texts and the propensity for scribal error, paraphrase, re-punctuation and "trivialisation" of complex passages. Once a poem had entered into the common ownership of the coterie, it is even suggested, individual members may have felt they had a license to alter or "improve" it. These problems may have been compounded by the existence of multiple authorial versions, as well as the fact that Donne himself was "temperamentally averse to collecting his own poetry" (69).

The more recent of Pebworth's essays concentrates on the "multiplicity of Donne's audiences during his lifetime" (127). Like the poems themselves, the readership too has an ephemeral quality that Pebworth describes as "multiple, various, fragmented". It is claimed that these multiple coterie had fluid memberships and often overlapped, despite the fact that the highly contextualised and functional nature of many of the poems dictated an initial audience that was "clearly and narrowly circumscribed" (128). Indeed, the "dynamic social exchange" that informs much of the work written for specific audiences and occasions renders it, Pebworth observes, "cryptic and intimate" (129). In addition to the primary audiences comprising his friends at the Inns of Court, prospective patrons, and eventually Ann More, Pebworth speculates that Donne would have enjoyed secondary readerships among the educated gentry, at Oxford and Cambridge, and among men at the Inns of Court who were outside his immediate circle. Another likely audience within the poet's lifetime, Pebworth proposes, would have been the readers of printed material in the form of excerpts published anonymously and without authorisation (136). It should be noted, however, that there is little in the way of evidence adduced to support these claims.

Pebworth's essays lend an interesting perspective to the notion of the dramatic in Donne. The concept of an "ethos of performance", in particular, invites consideration as to how it might determine certain dramatic aspects of the texts themselves. Pebworth suggests that it is manifest in such features as Donne's "imaginatively assuming the stances of his addressees. . . . [and] his tailoring of perspective to particular occasion"

(127). He also mentions, as a testimony to the efficacy of the ethos of performance, the fact that, despite a reluctance to publish, Donne's reputation as an important poet was established within a remarkably short time.

In "Browning, Donne, and the Triangulation of the Dramatic Monologue" John Maynard proposes what he considers a general, centrist reader response approach which identifies certain affinities between some of the poetry of Donne and that of Browning. Both poets, he argues, may be considered dramatic, not in any particular formal sense, but because their work privileges a "process of experience" (261) that embraces not only the expression of strong emotion but also the development of a reasoned argument. Although Donne was not, according to Maynard, an exclusive influence on Browning, he nonetheless provides a model that helps distinguish the Victorian from his contemporaries. Maynard anticipates the objection that Donne's poetry does not conform to the generic criteria of the dramatic monologue form pioneered by Browning by observing that collectively these formal characteristics "actually fit few of Browning's best monologues" (261). Indeed, and perhaps ironically, poems by Browning that fail to show all these characteristics are sometimes termed "inferior monologues" or "soliloquies" (262).

An important aspect of the Donnean legacy in Browning appears to have more to do with dialogical than with monological dynamics. In response to this observation Maynard suggests that the diversity of register, mixing of voices, adoption of colloquial language, and experimental rhythms found in Donne and owing much to generically dramatic verse are also central elements of Browning's style. Yet monologues they remain, insofar as the reader is only directly privy to the utterances of one speaker; they are dramatic "in effect" because the speaker is presented as a character whose words are clearly spoken rather than sung, and because "they involve us in a moment of drama itself, where something is being expressed between people that is going on in the act of speaking" (262). Here, although he does not say so, Maynard is proposing a "performative" use of language in the speech act theory sense, where an utterance effects significant change within a social context while at the same time describing its own process, as when a judge passes sentence or a ship is named in a launching ceremony, for example. A key part of the dramatic effect of the poetry, Maynard claims, is "the strong sense of a speaker finding self-definition as he enacts a moment of drama before us" (262).

The key terms in Maynard's analysis are "triangulation" and "overhearer", as is evident in the titles of two articles that share, practically verbatim, much of their material: "Browning, Donne, and the Triangulation of the Dramatic Monologue" (1985) and "Speaker, Listener, and Overhearer: the Reader in the Dramatic Poem" (1987). All further references are to the more recently published paper.

The notion of triangulation literally suggests the addition of an extra dimension, a spatiality, to the more conventional concept of a linear interplay between a poem's speaker and addressee, and this is what is most appealing about Maynard's approach. He holds that the listener (the addressee) functions like an audience in the dramatic poem, regardless of how well-rounded or minimal he or she may appear as a character in the poem's dramatic action, or even when there is no apparent listener. It is the reader who, as indirect listener or eavesdropper to the poem's action, enjoys a "normative" role, whose "position is determined by the relative positions of speaker and listener" (107). Or, more precisely, "[a]s overhearer rather than direct audience of the poem, the reader is drawn into a position vis à vis the speaker by his evaluation of, or reaction to, the speaker's rhetorical relation to the listener in the poem". At the same time it can be said that "[w]e read a dramatic monologue by reading its likely effect on another person also part of our read, the listener; or we read a dramatic poem without a listener by apprehending the special reasons for solo utterance" (107).

Maynard stresses that within the dynamics of triangulation the reader, or overhearer, of the dramatic poem is forced, through an ambivalence toward the speaker (and, one suspects, the addressee/listener), to create his or her own interpretative position. Moreover, this position is invariably somewhat provisional (in which case "space" is perhaps a more apt term than is "position"); the product of an unresolved dialectical process, it will be fluid rather than fixed in nature. Having convincingly identified the presence of the key features of his theory in such Donne poems as "The Sunne Rising" and "The Flea", Maynard concludes with the assertion that, as readers, "we are made especially active participants in the dramatisation of the poem: almost a kind of hidden Wellesian third man, not immediately apparent, entirely reactive, yet ultimately central to the dramatic action of the poem" (111-12).

Paul A. Parrish offers a study of the *Anniversaries* that identifies an analogy between Donne the poet and Donne the preacher. In his article "Poet, Audience, and the Word: An Approach to the *Anniversaries*" Parrish argues that such an analogy relies on the active role of an implied or intended audience, whether one is talking about the poems or the sermons. Indeed, he believes that certain sermons, "particularly the funeral sermons, provide an important commentary on the *Anniversaries*" (126) by dint of a more overt expression of "the preacher's emphasis on the necessary response of a virtuous audience and the crucial relationship between speaker, audience, and message" (127). From the reading audience, then, there is required an "active participation in the working out of the message of the poems" (127), in contrast to the more or less constant role of the poet/speaker. Parrish claims that even of "The Second Anniversary", ostensibly an "internal meditation", it cannot rightly be said that there is "no awareness of an external audience" (129).

As far as the explicit subject of the *Anniversaries* is concerned, the idealised figure of Elizabeth Drury, that too is dependent, Parrish insists, on an element of reader response that plays a role in the production of the poems' semantic textures: "For an audience to be able to respond to 'the idea of a Woman' rather than the person, it must exercise a free and imaginative response which parallels the free and imaginative creation of the poet" (134-5). Moreover, Parrish emphasises "the role of faith, both poetic and religious, in the relationship which exists between the poet and his audience", the key to which is the former's "assumption, indeed his insistence, that his ideal audience shares with him a commitment to virtue and goodness" (135). According to this model, the relationship between poet and audience is contractual, the outcome of shrewd and insistent negotiation. The poet identifies and authorises the precise qualities he desires in his co-creator, while also ensuring that the second party both understands and accepts his terms: "The *proper* audience—the only audience Donne intends his poems for—will respond in faith to the poet's efforts, for it recognizes the nature of the equation he makes. The audience the poet hopes to stimulate thus willingly submits itself to the poetic demands placed on it by the poet" (135).

Another article that focuses upon the "audience" of Donne's *Anniversaries* is Jeanne Shami's "Anatomy and Progress: The Drama of Conversion in Donne's Men of a 'Middle Nature'". Shami's basic hypothesis is that the poet's motivation is essentially the same as his motivation as a preacher of sermons: to "rouse the hearts" of his audience—constituted of men of a "middle nature"—from their lethargy and despair . . . [and] transform their general sense of God's providence into a motive for personal response to him" (221). Thus the poet, like the preacher, embarks upon a "re-energizing", "regenerative" enterprise that seeks to "achieve . . . [a] 'commerce' between his hearers and their God" (121). A participatory role for the audience is thereby prescribed, albeit initiated by stimulus provided by the text.

Such an enterprise is undertaken, Shami observes, through a process of teaching by example, whereby "Donne dramatizes imperfect people trying to make difficult Christian decisions and doubts the exemplary value of those cases that, despite other merits, are too 'singular' to be generally applicable" (121). The *Anniversaries*, then, attempt to "dramatize responses to God's ways" (222), and in doing so provide a universal "method of stimulating and correcting the memory" (223) of their reading audience. Moreover, it follows that if the poems' ostensible subject, Elizabeth Drury (who was *not* a personal acquaintance of the poet), is to be considered no more than a generally applicable type, "[i]t is the speaker of these poems, then, who is their subject" (224). Shami suggests that the idea of the speaker-as-subject in the *Anniversaries* has not received adequate critical attention (224n); by redressing that neglect, she adds, "one can readily observe a pattern of developing and slowly corrected response within the speaker that is initiated in his memory of her and altered by the very act of his

expressing it in song” (224). The same performative undercurrent to Shami’s model for the drama of conversion is implicitly reaffirmed in her concluding comments, where it is proposed that the didactic project of reconciliation that Donne, as poet and as homilist, initiates “by engaging his audience in these processes of doubt and reassurance. . . . [is] achieved in the very process of the works” (234).

In “The Plot of Donne’s *Anniversaries*”, James Andrew Clark perceives in Donne’s *Anniversaries* a series of three triangular relationships that function to inform the structuring of something akin to a plot in the two poems, which are treated as a kind of diptych. For Clark, this figure delineates an arrangement of characters into “the familiar triangle of the morality plays, where a central figure wavers between good and bad influences” (65). The consequential appeal of the poems, he argues, the factor that sustains the reader’s interest, is that they “promise to warm their cold readers with the radiance of Elizabeth Drury’s death” (63). The reader does not figure directly in Clark’s tripartite configurations; these are made up of a central character, the poet-as-allegorical-hero, located in a pig-in-the-middle-situation between two other points that are variously dramatised as God and the dead girl, God and all humanity, and life and death personified (75).

The tension inherent in these triangular relationships develops into a dramatic conflict as the central character “acts out the duality of his aversion and desire” (70). The resulting dynamics, Clark suggests, find allegorical parables in the Psalms, which “often act out dual impulses to preserve and destroy” (70-1), and in Plato’s *Republic*, where Leontius struggles with conflicting impulses of desire and dread when confronted with the opportunity to behold the corpses of executed criminals. Clark reminds us of Plato’s tripartite model for human psychology, in which “reason and desire, the two chief faculties of the soul, require a third entity, spirit, the shuttle between them” (71). It could, of course, be added that this triad bears some resemblance to the Freudian paradigm of the psyche, with its more or less corresponding elements: superego, id, and ego respectively. Freud also provides us with another potent example of struggle between opposing drives within a triangular relationship that manifests in the form of the Oedipus complex. Clark does in fact mention Freud when drawing a distinction between “repetition” and “remembrance”, a polarity that the latter uses as a model for understanding two typical symptoms of neurosis, projection and repression respectively (74). It is proposed that the emotional disturbance attributable to the conflict of opposing drives is reflected in such textual “symptoms” as the tortuous syntax and contradictory imagery of the *Anniversaries* (67-9).

The central location of the speaker-as-allegorical-hero in the dramatic triad belies the importance of the reader in Clark’s interpretation of the *Anniversaries*. He argues that although standing outside of it, the (implied) reader functions as the triangle’s point

of orientation. Moreover, the reader is a “fictive audience” (65) who eschews historical location either within Donne’s immediate coterie or posterity. The reader, then, is an ahistorical, transcendent participant in the construction of meaning for whom the poems’ speaker/protagonist stands as an emblematic or metaphorical vehicle within the teleology of the unfolding narrative.

Norman E. Carlson’s article “The Drama of Donne’s ‘The Indifferent’” comprises a reading of the poem that perceives a triangular relationship within a tripartite formal structure. The reader does not become aware until the third and final stanza that the first two stanzas are in fact a song performed, and in all probability composed, by the emergent speaker, “a character in a mini-drama, and not the poet-as-poet” (67). There is only one other character present in the immediate action of the poem: a presumably female addressee whom the speaker chides for her fidelity in love. The argument is perplexing if we assume that the speaker himself is the lover to whom the woman is faithful. Carlson offers a logical and satisfying alternative reading by suggesting it is to an absent third party that she remains true, and that the speaker’s remonstrations are simply a witty attempt at seduction.

In a short paper entitled “Teaching Donne Through Performance”, Nicholas Jones advocates a “text-as-script emphasis” (120) for a performance-based classroom study of Donne’s poetry, much in keeping with techniques of Shakespeare pedagogy promoted by the Royal Shakespeare Company and educational groups. Jones delimits the aims of his study by asserting that he is not particularly concerned with either the “distant historical and social contexts, [or with the] unfamiliar literary conventions” that inform the poems, but rather “with helping the student get a grasp on Donne’s wonderful and idiosyncratic language” (129).

It is Jones’s belief that “Donne’s lyrics have even more dramatic elements than Shakespeare’s sonnets, giving the performer strong—if ambiguous—implications for characterized voice, action, interchange, and situation” (121). Comprehension and interpretation of the poems, however, are often hampered by “the strong line, mystifying texture, ragged diction, strange syntax, and emphatic meter” (121). Jones believes that the practice of getting students to perform the poems by reading or reciting them out loud to their classmates provides valuable interpretative insights through a heightened awareness of qualities such as alliteration, metrical inversion, and what is described as the “coining effect”, whereby “a slight pause, a lift, before a figure gives the impression that the speaker is coining or inventing the figure”. Jones suggests that in a vocalised performance this type of caesural “illusion of invention emphasizes the purposeful and rhetorical aspects of metaphysical imagery” (124).

Other advantages, Jones suggests, of oral performance include the potential for drawing attention to image sequences, the possibility of experimentation with speaker characterisation, and the likelihood of an increased awareness of “gaps in the poem”

that allow for a consideration of such implicit factors as addressee response or the complicating textures of a “hidden situation” (125). Above all, Jones emphasises the notion that the text-as-script approach does not view the text as a static, finished product in terms of meaning; on the contrary, he insists that “multiplicity of interpretation is crucial”. Individual performances, nonetheless, call for “a singleness of intent, a willingness to give up indeterminacy for a while” (126). This method, therefore, provides a valuable educational tool that is able to utilise a focus on the specific that paves the way for an appreciation of diversity, allowing, perhaps, for a kind of transformational hermeneutics of Donne’s poetry.

In summary, the critics discussed in this chapter demonstrate that the concept of the dramatic in Donne can be perceived outside of the authorial or psychological presence of the poet himself or of his speaking personae. Something akin to audience participation is thereby demanded of the reader, which serves to justify analogies with generic drama in the sense of interactive live performance. Peabworth claims that Donne, as a coterie poet, worked within an “ethos of performance”. Maynard observes a dynamics of triangulation in Donne that he associates with the dramatic monologues of Browning. Parrish, Shami, and Clark provide readings of the *Anniversaries* that focus upon the role of the reader and incorporate the concept of triangular dynamics in slightly altered forms, as does Carlson with regard to “The Indifferent”. Jones advocates as an educational tool the notion of the text as play script, arguing for an element of indeterminacy that allows for a multiplicity of individual interpretations through actual live performance.

## PART II: *THEATRUM MUNDI* AND METADRAMA IN THE AGE OF DONNE

### Introduction

Whereas I have called the first part of this study “metacritical”, insofar as it argues that the concept of Donne as a dramatic poet arises from the application of that epithet by critics of the twentieth century, the part that follows I shall call both metacritical and “metadramatic”. By means of this latter term I refer to an aspect of Donne’s work that has, by-and-large, been overlooked by those critics who have considered Donne to be in some way dramatic. Attempts to order the use of that label into various categories, while telling us something about the concerns of individual commentators, nonetheless fail to provide an overarching theory of the dramatic element in Donne. In order to provide such a focal theory this part of the thesis will begin with a discussion of the *theatrum mundi* topos which, I shall argue, provides part of a contextual framework from which dramatic aspects of Donne’s poetry are inferred by the reader, or poetic audience.

In Part I of the thesis I discussed the use of theatrical or dramatic terminology by critics writing about Donne’s poetry. My conclusion was that such usage, particularly of the epithet “dramatic”, applied to non-dramatic writing, is more often than not less than specific and thus tantamount to a dead metaphor or a synonym for other attributives such as “intense”, “moody”, “complex”, or “posturing”. Despite such indeterminacy, discussion of other non-dramatic genres in terms properly applied to drama has become an accepted and useful convention of literary criticism; it follows, then, that to some extent at least, the discipline of literary criticism has become “metadramatic”, that the concept of theatrical performance is now a central leitmotif for the discussion of non-dramatic genres of creative writing. Consider, for example, the following observations from Wayne C. Booth’s highly influential treatise *The Rhetoric of Fiction* on the ways in which the term “dramatic” can be apply to works of prose fiction:

The author can present his characters in a dramatic situation without in the least presenting them in what we would normally think of as a dramatic manner. . . . If to be dramatic is to show characters dramatically engaged with each other, motive clashing with motive, the outcome depending upon the resolution of motives, then this scene [from *Joseph Andrews*] is dramatic. But if it is to give the impression that the story is taking place by itself, with the characters existing in a dramatic relationship vis-à-vis the spectator, unmediated by a narrator and decipherable only through inferential matching of word to word and word to deed, then this is a relatively undramatic scene.

On the other hand, an author can present a character in this latter kind of dramatic relationship with the reader without involving that character in any internal drama at all. Many lyric poems are dramatic in this sense, and undramatic in any other. “That is no country for old men—” Who says? Yeats, or his “mask” says. To whom? To us. How do we know that it is Yeats and not some



character as remote from him as Caliban is remote from Browning in "Caliban upon Setebos"? We infer it as the dramatized statement unfolds; the need for the inference is what makes the lyric dramatic in this sense. Caliban, in short, is dramatic in two senses; he is in a dramatic situation with other characters, and he is in a dramatic situation over against us. Yeats' poem is dramatic in only one sense.

The ambiguities of the word dramatic are even more complicated in fiction that attempts to dramatize states of consciousness directly. Is *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* dramatic? In some respects, yes. We are not told about Stephen. He is placed on the stage before us, acting out his destiny with only disguised helps or comments from his author. But it is not his actions that are dramatized directly, not his speech that we hear unmediated. What is dramatized is his mental record of everything that happens. We see his consciousness at work on the world. Sometimes what it records is itself dramatic, as when Stephen observes himself in a scene with other characters. But the report itself, the internal record, is dramatic in the second sense only. The report we are given of what goes on in Stephen's mind is a monologue uninvolved in any modifying dramatic context. And it is an infallible report, even less subject to critical doubts than the typical Elizabethan soliloquy. We accept, by convention, the claim that what is reported as going on in Stephen's mind really goes on there, or in other words, that Joyce knows how Stephen's mind works. . . . the omniscient, infallible author. The report is direct, and it is clearly unmodified by any "dramatic" context—that is, unlike a speech in a dramatic scene, it does not lead us to suspect that the thoughts have been in any way aimed at an effect. We are thus in a dramatic relation with Stephen only in a limited sense—the sense in which a lyric poem is dramatic. (161-3)

Booth here alerts our attention to the ambiguity of the term "dramatic" as it has been applied to works of prose fiction. It can refer, in the most simple sense, to the narrative presentation of a dramatic situation in which the motives of characters are seen to conflict and resolve. Secondly, the term may indicate an absence of narrative intervention. In a third sense, which Booth likens to lyric poetry and Elizabethan soliloquy, the dramatic element is a matter of showing (rather than telling of) the protagonist's "consciousness at work on the world" that convention guarantees as infallible or true as far as the speaker is concerned within the fictional world of the work. This idea of convention as a guarantee of relative truth-value recurs in Wolfgang Clemen's discussion of Shakespeare's soliloquies which, as has been shown in the passages on Cruttwell and Leishman, have been used for comparative study of dramatic elements in Donne. Such comparisons of Donne's poems and personae with Shakespeare's soliloquies, particularly those of Hamlet, call for consideration of Clemen's observations regarding the conventions and dynamics of Shakespearean soliloquy which I shall summarise in the chapter covering the principles of metadrama.

The leakage of theatrical terms into the critical discussion of generically non-dramatic literature also serves to alert us to the problematic notion of genre categorisation. Alastair Fowler, in his book *Kinds of Literature*, uses the example of genre maps to illustrate the difficulty of organising genre beyond what he considers the inadequate and problematic Aristotelian scheme comprising three what are generally understood to be essential representational modes of the lyric, the dramatic, and the narrative which Fowler sees as quite distinctive from genre *per se*, while also

questioning as to whether the scheme should be considered exhaustive. Fowler refutes attempts to categorise genres in terms of “language function”, noting that drama in particular (and dramatic writing figuratively, by extension) comprises a complexity of non-linguistic elements:

Indeed, all narrative art is to some extent independent of linguistic considerations, and therefore not fully accessible via nineteenth-century concepts of autotelic language. In drama, again, words may be subsidiary, unintelligible, even absent altogether. It is of interest in this connection that Susanne Langer denies drama to be literature at all, treating it together with film as a separate *poesis*, independent of language. (238)

The section on Cruttwell in Part I presented that critic’s view that the theatre provided a natural metaphoric vehicle for both Donne and Shakespeare. Explicit theatrical references occur regularly if not frequently in Donne, but it does not necessarily follow from this that the poet had any particular liking for the drama, as many have assumed, following Baker’s report regarding his frequenting of plays. Donne had a wide range of interests and learning on which he could draw, so it seems more likely that when he alluded to drama it was because it provided the most suitable vehicle to express his poetic subject at that point. As the following sections will show, the *theatrum mundi* topos is a complex concept, involving far more than a metaphorical coupling of world and stage. My argument is that in his work Donne both appreciates and incorporates the subtle as well as the more overt and conventional aspects of the topos, which is why it is not traceable to any obvious abundance of dramatic allusion but is, rather, part of a wider field of optical and phenomenological imagery that culminates in the concept not only of world-as-stage and stage-as-world but also with that of the poem-as-theatre.

## Chapter Four

### The Literary Tradition of the World-Stage Metaphor

The metaphor of the world as a stage was a well-worn literary cliché by the time Donne was writing. It is not surprising, then, that a poet who avoided allusions to classical mythology and subverted many of the poetic commonplaces inherited from Petrarchan and neoplatonic models should not make extensive, overt use of the topos. It is nonetheless present in both his poetry and prose and on occasion provides a tangible basis for estimating his attitude towards the use of the theatre as a metaphorical vehicle. Similarly, while there is no direct evidence as to the influence of Shakespeare, for example, that is not to say that self-consciously theatrical aspects of Shakespeare's craft were not picked up and adapted for the idiosyncratic usage of the "magpie" Donne.

As the section that follows will show, the *theatrum mundi* topos has two main aspects. The first of these is phenomenological and spatial, often concerned with the polarity of illusion versus reality and therefore with concepts such as deceit, (in)sincerity, disguise, role-playing, plays within plays, mistaken identity, dreams, drunkenness, and delirium. The second is temporal and is embodied in what has come to be known as the "ages-of-man" topos, the most well known example of which is provided by Jaques's "All the world's a stage" speech in *As You Like It*. This trope, which will be treated as a sub-topos of the theatre-world metaphor, is concerned with subjects including transformation, maturation, human types, *memento mori*, times of day and seasons, and the concept of life as a journey.

#### ***Theatrum Mundi* from Antiquity and the Middle Ages to the Renaissance**

Ernst Robert Curtius traces the *theatrum mundi* topos as far back as Plato's *Laws* and *Philebus*, in which man is presented as a mere "puppet" or "plaything" of the gods, and life itself is compared to "tragedy and comedy" (138). The idea of human beings as puppets or actors is recurrent in the diatribes of the Cynics, in Horatian satire, and in Seneca. Similarly the Roman circus is used as an image by Saint Paul in I Corinthians and by Clement of Alexandria and the Egyptian, Palladas, who writes "All life is a stage and a game: either learn to play it, laying by seriousness, or bear its pains". The topos can be seen, then, to reach the Latin poetry of the Middle Ages through a combination of pagan and early Christian writers.

It is in twelfth-century England, and John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1159), however, that Curtius perceives a development of the "old, threadbare actor simile" into "the conceptual framework for a comprehensive critique of the age" (139). The notions of various human types as *dramatis personae* and the observation that "outward splendor is but empty show" (139) combine to form a global topos of the *scena vitae*,

which in turn is extended into the cosmological metaphor of *theatrum mundi* in which the world is not so much a playhouse as a stage in a celestial theatre where the spectators of the “terrestrial play”, which is both tragic and comic, are the inhabitants of heaven (140). The *Policraticus*, Curtius tells us, was popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during which it was printed on at least seven occasions (including 1595, when Donne was twenty-three) and circulated widely, therefore qualifying it, to Curtius’s thinking, as the major literary vehicle by which the more developed *theatrum mundi* topos entered Renaissance thinking and literature.

Curtius traces the medieval English humanist John of Salisbury’s influence in the later sixteenth century through French court comedy and Ronsard, who presents in an epilogue the notion of *theatrum mundi* “with men as actors, Fortune as the stage director, and Heaven a spectator” (140), to the opening of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in 1599. One of the earliest Shakespearean comedies staged there was *As You Like It*, and Curtius draws our attention to the assertion of G.B. Harrison that Jaques’s “All the world’s a stage” speech is tantamount to an essay by Shakespeare on the Latin motto that is thought to have been displayed on the new building. “*Totus mundus agit histrionem*”, Curtius observes, is taken almost verbatim from the *Policraticus* and not from Petronius as has sometimes been claimed (141). Curtius continues to trace the development of the topos in seventeenth-century Spanish literature and of drama with Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, Gracián’s *Criticón*, and, most notably, Calderón’s play *La vida es sueño*, in which Curtius perceives the first example of “the God-directed *theatrum mundi* [as] the subject of sacred drama” (142). The classical precursors from antiquity and the English and French examples from medieval humanism and the Renaissance remained solidly anthropocentric, and provide the foundations for the neo-classical tragedy of Racine and Goethe, whose reality is “the play of man’s psychological powers” (142) enacted in an existential realm of ethical choices divorced from the concerns of religion and the cosmos. The “theocentric” version of the topos introduced by Calderón, Curtius argues, surfaces again in the early twentieth century in Hofmannsthal’s *Jedermann*, which is based on the fifteenth-century morality play *Everyman*.

### ***Theatrum Mundi* and Iconography**

In a short paper entitled “‘All the World’s a Stage’: Some Illustrations of the *Theatrum Mundi*”, Harriett Bloker Hawkins draws attention to three Renaissance pictures that illustrate “a number of themes, especially significant to playwrights and actors” (174) that had come to be associated with the concept of *theatrum mundi*, itself so widely known a concept in the period as to constitute a commonplace.

The first theme Hawkins identifies is the concept of a the world as “cosmic theatre” or “sacramental universe” as depicted in an illustration in Jean J. Boissard’s

*Theatrum Vitae Humanae* (Metz, 1596). In the picture “the deity and heavenly figures, as well as human figures of various ranks, observe the spectacle of skeletons and a devil inflicting punishment on sinners” (175). Hawkins notes the similarity of this depiction to the images presented in the final section of a poem entitled “The Author to his Booke” that prefixes Thomas Heywood’s *Apology for Actors* (1612):

If then the world a Theater present,  
As by the roundness it appeares most fit,  
Built with starre-galleries of hie ascent,  
In which *Jehoue* does as spectator sit,  
And chiefe determiner to applaud the best,  
And their indeuours crowne with more than merit,  
But their euill actions doomes the rest  
To end discrac’t, whilst others praise inherit,  
He that denyes then Theaters should be,  
He may as well deny a world to me. (sig. a4<sup>v</sup> 21-30)

The second picture, from Giovanni Ferro’s *Teatro d’Imprese* (Venice 1623), bears a motto (*Fingit at docet*) and commentary that summarise a second theme of the theatre as not only a place of feigning (as its detractors are wont to argue), but also as a place of instruction. The “scene of the world” is to be perceived essentially as comedic because as in a stage comedy people are often other than they appear to be (175).

The passage from Heywood’s poem above also emphasises the significance of the *theatrum mundi* topos “in terms of the physical appearance of contemporary theaters, since the similarity between the shape of the globe and the shape of a theater suggested that the spectacles of the one were comparable to the spectacles of the other” (175). This idea is echoed in the third illustration, also an *impresa* from Ferro, that “shows an amphitheater, and a Herculean figure bearing the globe” (175); this triadic image of theatre, globe, and Herculean figure, Hawkins adds, appears to be an established one and it has been suggested, albeit contentiously and inconclusively, that such a picture was used as an ensign to Shakespeare’s Globe accompanied by the purported motto *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (177-8).

### **The World-as-Theatre as Metaphor for Spiritual Vision on Earth in Donne’s Sermon on I Corinthians 13:12**

Winfried Schleiner observes that the variations of the *theatrum mundi* topos as elaborated by Curtius tend to share a common theme of “pretense, illusion, and disillusionment” (147). Donne makes some use of the topos with regard to this thematic concern in the sermons, when he warns of the consequences of insincerity in prayer: “Nor is it those transitory and interlocutory prayers, which out of custome and fashion we make, and still proceed in our sin; when we pretend to speake to God, but like Comedians upon a stage, turne over our shoulder, and whisper to the Devill” (Potter

and Simpson 9:325, 14:422; Schleiner 147). Similarly, Schleiner observes traditional uses of the topos to represent “the world as a place where action, determined by its end, is particularly significant” (147), illustrating such usage with another example from the sermons:

He that relyes upon his *Plaudo domi*, Though the world hisse, I give my selfe a Plaudite at home, I have him at my Table, and her in my bed, whom I would have, and I care not for rumor; he that rests in such a Plaudite, prepares for a Tragedy, a Tragedy in the Amphitheater, the double Theater, this world, and the next too. (Potter and Simpson 9:309, 13:478; Schleiner 147).

Schleiner notes, however, in the section of his book entitled “The Eyes of the Soul”, that “[i]n a number of cases Donne’s use of *theatrum mundi* metaphors is an explication of the larger field of [visual] imagery in which understanding is presented in terms of perception” (146). He also makes the point that Curtius fails to adduce any such version of the metaphor (147). The fact, moreover, that nine examples of this variation are all observed in one of Donne’s sermons (and, implicitly, nowhere else) provide Schleiner with the grounds for his theory that Donne as preacher used the *theatrum mundi* topos in a way that was innovative and theocentric before Calderón and the “brilliant rebirth” of the metaphor that Curtius attributes to seventeenth-century Catholic Spain.

So in what ways can the *theatrum mundi* topos, as it occurs in Donne’s sermon on I Corinthians 13:12, be considered part of a field of imagery concerned with “spiritual vision” (147)? The biblical verse itself contains visual imagery, but it seems rather a leap to infer from that any connection with the world-theatre metaphor: “For now we see through a glasse darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as also I am knowne”. Donne explicates the specular nature of the imagery contained in the verse as indicating two kinds of sight of God, that of this earthly life which is always partial and mediated, and that of the afterlife which is analogous with a complete and reciprocated knowledge of God:

For, here we see God *In speculo, in a glasse*, that is, by reflexion, and here we know God *In ænigmate*, sayes our Text, *Darkly*, (so we translate it) that is, by obscure representation, and therefore it is called a *Knowledge but in part*; But in heaven, our sight is *face to face*, And our knowledge is to *know as we are knowne*. (Potter and Simpson 8:220, 9:37)

As Donne’s sermon continues, it provides a detailed description of the theatre metaphor as implied by the verse on which it is based, that is, in terms of seeing “through a glasse darkly”:

for our sight of God here, our Theatre, the place where we sit and see him, is the whole world, the whole house and frame of nature, and our medium, our glasse, is the Booke of Creatures, and our light, by which we see him, is the light of Naturall

Reason. And then, for our knowledge of God here, our Place, our Academy, our University is the Church, our medium, is the Ordinance of God in his Church, Preaching, and Sacraments; and our light is the light of faith. (Potter and Simpson 8:220, 9:42)

The theatre analogy, then, applies only to the idea of our imperfect view of God while we live in the world; as for our sight of him in heaven, “our place, our Sphere is heaven it selfe” (Potter and Simpson 8:220, 9:50). As metaphorical vehicle, the theatre thus represents imperfect spiritual vision but that is not to say that it is pernicious. Indeed, according to the sermon, the world-as-theatre provides the best glimpse of the creator available to us. As Schleiner points out, the connection between the theatre-world metaphor and the text of the sermon becomes unmistakable when we reach a particular paragraph whose theme is identified by a marginal note which reads “*Theatrum mundus*” and which closes with the following sentence: “Whether we be in the darknesse of ignorance, or darknesse of the works of darknesse, or darknesse of oppression of spirit in sadness, The world is the Theatre that represents God, and everywhere man may, nay must see him” (Potter and Simpson 8:223, 9:152; Schleiner 147).

For Donne, according to Schleiner, such second-order usage of the theatre-world metaphor as a trope for spiritual vision on earth is removed from its more conventional usage which concentrates on the polarity of play and reality; “the theater is not primarily a place where a play is staged; the relevant fact about it is that it is a place which allows for concentrated vision” (148). That vision, moreover, is itself metaphorical, Schleiner argues, rather than being associated with literal sensory perception. As the sermon testifies, the word “sight” is interchangeable with “knowledge” and therefore lends itself to abstraction. Indeed, Donne underscores the figurative dimension of the five senses by citing patristic and scriptural passages that represent the other senses as forms of sight: “The sight is so much the Noblest of all the senses, as that it is all the senses” (Potter and Simpson 8:221, 9:61).

The second-order imagery of the medium of the “Booke of creatures” as a kind of looking glass (*speculum*) serves to draw our attention to a relation between the *theatrum mundi* topos and that of *liber mundi*, or the book of the world, in the form of the notion of the “glass” of the scriptures. As Schleiner points out, Donne’s sermon does not make use of Paul’s reference to the theatre in the form of the Roman circus (mentioned above in the section on Curtius): “For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men” (I Corinthians 4:9). Schleiner nonetheless observes “the phonetic and semantic similarity between *speculum* [‘mirror’] and *spectaculum*—‘spectacle’” (148). In addition to meaning “show” or “display”, “spectacle” also has the optical meaning of “corrective lens” or “eye glass”, plus the now obsolete meaning of

either “window” or “mirror”, thus making the English “spectacle” synonymous with the Latin “*speculum*” (149). Although Schleiner fails to observe it, I believe there is an important distinction between the idea of a glass, *speculum*, or spectacle in the sense of a mirror and that of a window or lens. I suggest, moreover, that by ignoring the implications of such a distinction, Schleiner’s otherwise highly perceptive analysis of the *theatrum mundi* topos as a figure for spiritual vision also fails to provide a clear demarcation between the trope and that of the *liber mundi*, the-book-of-the-world topos and its associated analogy of the scriptures as a mirror (149).

The translation of the text Donne uses for the sermon, which was preached at Saint Paul’s on Easter Day 1628, is, I believe, significant. The 1611 King James Version of the verse from I Corinthians upon which the sermon is based reads “For now we see through a glasse darkly”. The preposition “through” strongly suggests that the kind of glass Donne has in mind is not a mirror (which would collocate with “in” or, possibly, “into”) but either a window or some kind of lens such as, for example, a telescope. When in the sermon he discusses the finer points of translation (“For here we see God *In speculo, in a glasse*, that is, by reflexion”), Donne acknowledges that a literal translation from the Latin favours the reading of “*In speculo*” as referring to a mirror. This lends all the more weight to the proposition that the translation of the text that heads the sermon with the phrase “through a glass” is consciously exploited by Donne to locate the *theatrum mundi* topos in a field of imagery concerned not only with spiritual vision, as Schleiner correctly observes, but also and specifically within a subset of that field of imagery which is concerned with the concept of refraction rather than reflection (even if there is an element of vacillation between the two within the actual transcription of the sermon). The glass we see through darkly is thus more like a window that we try to look through from inside a lit room at night. The interior of that lit room is the theatre of the world, the familiar surroundings of our daily lives; any vague form we can make out beyond the glass is but the imperfect vision or knowledge of God that we are confined to in this life. The glass itself, or “Booke of Creatures” is thus seen to mediate between earth and heaven. It is also suggestive of a glimpse of the other, rather than a mere reflection of ourselves. The concept of imperfect, partial or impaired vision ties in, moreover, with the notion of the corrective lens, or spectacle as discussed above. This, then, is quite a different image from that of the mirror, which is more in keeping with the book-of-the-world topos in the form Augustine calls the *serenissimum speculum* or “clearest mirror” that is the mirror of Scripture (Schleiner 149).

### **The Book-of-Creatures and Mirror-of-Scripture Topoi**

As Schleiner points out, the metaphor of the book of life (*liber vitae*) or God’s book of the world (*liber mundi Dei*) that Donne refers to as the “Booke of creatures” is



something of an obvious literary cliché and one that Renaissance writers inherit from the Middle Ages, where it originated in the practice of “pulpit eloquence” (95). My contention is that Donne, who tends either to transcend literary conventions or to avoid them altogether, would have been aware of the hackneyed status of the image. Joan Webber, in her book *Contrary Music: The Prose Style of John Donne*, attempts to systematise book allusions in the sermons in terms of the book-of-creatures commonplace, connecting it with the microcosm/macrocosm topos in terms of assertions by Donne that man is a book within a book (125). This she in turn associates with Milton’s dictum of the poet-as-poem, and Herbert’s notion of the preacher-as-sermon (126[n]). Webber also discusses Donne’s figurative use of grammatical figures, the emblem book, the *impresa*, and the hieroglyph as variations of the book-of-creatures metaphor (126-9). But as M.A. Rugoff has noted (109), and as Schleiner agrees (95, 98), Donne’s references to books in both his poetry and prose are too heterogeneous to allow for convincing analytical systematisation.

Schleiner does perceive, however, a tendency in the sermons for book imagery to serve “one overriding intention” (96), that of “point[ing] to an author” (97). So Donne uses the hackneyed trope in a similar vein to what has come to be known as the “mechanistic argument” for the existence of God: the intricate nature of creation points to a creator who is the ultimate artificer. While Donne uses this as a fairly transparent didactic reminder of God’s presence behind all things, the trope also anthropomorphises God to some degree. Such an observation is consistent with the fact that the mechanistic argument became prevalent during the late Renaissance as society became increasingly secular.<sup>5</sup> In terms of theatrical association it is also interesting to ponder, as does Frances A. Yates, that “[w]hen people in the early seventeenth century talk of ‘machines’ they usually mean theatrical machines” (85).

Donne contrasts the book of creatures with the Scriptures, asserting the pre-eminence of the former and noting that “the Scriptures are but a paraphrase, but as a comment, but an illustration of that booke of Creatures” (Potter and Simpson 3:264, 12:284; Schleiner 99). This comparison upholds the notion that the Bible is merely a reflection, a mirroring of God’s truth that is acted out by the book of creatures in the theatre of the world. The relation is that of script to actor. This seems a logical preference for Donne, who, though scholarly, was not constricted by bookishness or ivory towers. What we know about his life and the legacy of his writing both suggest that he was first and foremost a worldly man who came to aspire to a more contemplative life than that which he had known in his early adulthood. Moreover,

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<sup>5</sup> The mechanistic world view also reflects a contemporary preoccupation with the manufacture of complex precision instruments such as clocks and sextants. Within the history of ideas it bridges Renaissance and baroque thinking, culminating in Newtonian physics and deterministic arguments against free will.

while phenomenological scepticism was a hallmark of the intellectuals of Donne's generation, it is perhaps not surprising that a skilful, manipulative wordsmith with a thorough grounding in rhetoric and the law should be equally sceptical about the propensity for illusion and insubstantiality in linguistic representation. Donne's innovative and sophisticated use of the *theatrum mundi* topos in the sermon on I Corinthians 13:12 and the lack of any cohesive or elaborate field of book imagery in the sermons are indicative of his preference for that trope. Moreover, he does not, as Harris argues, confine his use of theatrical imagery merely to "reject the theatre" (1962 261), labelling it perniciously and dismissively as a symbol of insincerity, feigned piety or loyalty, and the false consolation of diversion.

There is an element of intersection between the *theatrum mundi* and book-of-creatures topoi as Donne presents them in the sermon on I Corinthians 13:12. Yet, as I have demonstrated, the theatrical image is dominant. I believe this is in keeping with Donne's view of himself as a writer, both of poetry and sermons. As a poet he assiduously avoided publication lest he be considered a mere "whining poet" or, possibly more damaging, one who aspired to be a professional man of letters like his friend Ben Jonson, for example. Donne's secular ambitions as a young man are likely to have been incompatible with such a public image; he was therefore careful to maintain his status as a strictly amateur coterie poet for whom the composition of verse was ostensibly a mere trifle often aimed unashamedly at securing patronage and favour at court. Similarly, as a priest the mature Donne would not have considered his profession to be primarily that of a writer of sermons but rather that of a preacher of them. In other words, as with his poetry, it is likely that the literary artefact was of no special concern to Donne in itself. This aspect of what Peabworth calls the "ethos of performance" provides a clue as to why theatrical performance in all its noisy evanescence, while not ubiquitously evident throughout his work, provides a more satisfactory underlying master trope than does the book.

In the sections that follow, I shall demonstrate that Donne is subtly committed to the notion of the poem as a theatre of the mind and that this image is in keeping with his delimited and original usage of the *theatrum mundi* topos that I have discussed in this section. Schleiner and Curtius have identified the influence of Saint Paul and John of Salisbury. There are, however, other influences to be considered in order to gain a more comprehensive view of the potential for inferring an underlying awareness of *theatrum mundi* as a contextual leitmotif in a number of Donne's dramatic lyrics. For example, Donne's often cryptic use of the theatre as a master trope is related, I suggest, to Sidney's idea of the poem as a picture in words. Also, it would be negligent not to consider other likely influences such as Shakespeare's use of *theatrum mundi*, the spatial significance of playhouse architecture, and temporal aspects of metadrama embodied in the ages-of-man trope. A distinctive quality of Donne, I suggest, is that for

him the book of creatures is always subordinate to the theatre of the world, a window rather than a mirror, just as a sheet of paper or parchment, when held up to the light, becomes translucent, no longer a page but a kind of screen that can be used for shadow play. Such imagery, in addition to reinforcing the notion of incomplete vision or imperfect knowledge, harks back to Plato, with whom this part of the study began, and to the concept of appearance versus truth or illusion versus reality as illustrated by his allegory of the cave.

**Chapter Five**  
**Theatrum Humanae Vitae:**  
**Temporal Dimensions of Theatrum Mundi**

**The Tradition and Typology of the Ages-of-Man Topos**

So interconnected is the *theatrum mundi* topos with the ages-of-man metaphor that the distinction between fundamentally disparate figurative ideas has become somewhat blurred. It is helpful, therefore, to observe that both the tenor and the vehicle of *theatrum mundi* (and the two are interchangeable: world-as-theatre and theatre-as-world) are essentially spatial concepts. The ages-of-man trope, on the other hand, is essentially temporal; each age, although discrete, is fixed within a prescribed order or progression (from birth to death). The most well-known conflation of the two topoi is, of course, Jaques's speech from *As You Like It* that begins with the lines "All the world's a stage". Often, though, it is referred to as the "seven ages-of-man" speech, and is usually associated with the melancholic temperament of the character performing the utterance. The speech is best presented in the context of the Duke Senior's lines that precede it and to which it responds.

DUKE SENIOR: Thou seest, we are not all alone unhappy:  
 This wide and universal theatre  
 Presents more woeful pageants than the scene  
 Wherein we play in.

JAQUES: All the world's a stage,  
 And all the men and women, merely players;  
 They have their exits and their entrances,  
 And one man in his time plays many parts,  
 His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
 Mewling, and puking in the nurse's arms.  
 Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel  
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
 Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,  
 Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
 Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,  
 Seeking the bubble reputation  
 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then, the justice,  
 In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
 With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,  
 Full of wise saws, and modern instances;  
 And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
 Into the lean and slippered pantaloone,  
 With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,  
 His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide  
 For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
 That ends this strange eventful history,  
 Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,

Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (II, vii, 135-65)<sup>6</sup>

Note that the theatrical imagery introduced by the Duke Senior—"theatre", "presents", "pageants", "scene", "play"—is echoed only in the first few lines of Jaques's speech—"stage", "players", "exits", "entrances", "plays", "parts", "acts". This fairly intense cluster of theatrical terms is then abruptly abandoned, almost as if, having mockingly undermined the Duke Senior's use of a commonplace, Jaques modulates from the basic or naive world-stage metaphor to one that better reflects his own melancholy state of mind, his *contemptus mundi*. Indeed, such a determination to switch tropes is evident in the rather awkward conceptual transition from "parts" to "acts". The former term points to nominalist, ontological and psychological categories with regard to the individuation of (human) identity, while the latter is temporal, referring to the individuation of dramatic action. Plays have acts but not parts (they have characters); players have parts but not acts (although we may talk of actors having scenes). The two terms do not sit easily together as paradigmatically contiguous concepts so the first step of the shift from "parts" to "acts" to "ages" feels forced. The sense of *theatrum mundi* is successfully maintained, however, by the throw-away "And so he *plays* his *part*" (155) and "Last *scene* of all, / That ends this strange eventful *history*" (162-3, my emphasis). Aside from these links it is as if Jaques has no desire to maintain the explicit theatrical imagery initiated by the Duke Senior. The forced shift at the beginning of the speech need not be considered a failing on the part of the playwright, however. On the contrary, it emphasises the fact that the monologue is dramatic, that it is Jaques speaking and not Shakespeare.<sup>7</sup> Such an emphasis, moreover, enhances the metadramatic aspect of the monologue. Jaques is not really addressing anyone; rather he merely allows his words to re-enact his own nihilism.

Two other Elizabethan examples of the *theatrum humanae vitae* topos are to be found in the following poems attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh, the first of which, "On the Life of Man", compares life to a comedy and the second, "*De Morte*"<sup>8</sup>, to a tragedy:

What is our life? a play of passion,  
Our mirth the music of division;  
Our mothers' wombs the tiring-houses be  
Where we are dressed for this short comedy;  
Heaven the judicious, sharp spectator is

<sup>6</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from Evans, Gwynne Blakemore and J.J.M. Tobin, eds. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Second ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Tibor Fabiny makes a similar point in his essay "*Theatrum Mundi* and the Ages of Man" (293) based on an observation in Samuel Chew's *The Pilgrimage of Life* (145).

<sup>8</sup> The authorship of this poem is uncertain; it does not appear in Latham's authoritative edition but only in the *Works*, which is of dubious scholarly standing. This Fabiny fails to note, but since *De Morte* is included here for its treatment of the *theatrum mundi* topos, it matters little as to whether or not it is actually by Raleigh.

That sits and marks still who doth act amiss;  
 Our graves that hide us from the searching sun  
 Are like drawn curtains when the play is done:  
 Thus march we, playing, to our latest rest,  
 Only we die in earnest, that's no jest. (Latham 51)

Man's life's a tragedy: his mother's womb,  
 From which he enters, is his tiring room,  
 This spacious earth the theatre, and the stage  
 That country which he lives in: passions, rage,  
 Folly, and vice are actors: the first cry  
 The prologue to the ensuing tragedy.  
 The former act consisteth of dumb-shows:  
 The second, he to more perfection grows,  
 I'th' third he is a man, and doth begin  
 To nurture vice, and act the deeds of sin:  
 I'th' fourth declines, i'th' fifth diseases clog  
 And trouble him, then death's his epilogue. (*Works* Vol.8 704-5)

The first of these poems does not deal specifically with the ages of man; it is, nonetheless, an example of *theatrum humanae vitae* rather than *theatrum mundi* because the opening metaphor equates life rather than the world with a play. The poem frames the idea of a cosmic theatre ("Heaven the judicious, sharp spectator is / That sits and marks still who doth act amiss") with the theatrical allusion to the "tiring houses" (dressing rooms) that are "Our mothers wombs" and the "drawn curtains" that are "Our graves" (the imagery here is very similar though differently applied, it should be noted, to that used by Donne in "The Sunne Rising"). The second poem is closer to Jaques's monologue as it depicts distinct ages of human life. Unlike Jaques, though, Raleigh's speaker is more at pains to connect each act with the temporal progression of dramatic action. Life is therefore represented as five acts (including death) that are approximately representative of the five acts into which Elizabethan drama is conventionally (albeit contentiously) divided. Raleigh's scheme, like Jaques's, is in fact seven-part if the "prologue" ("the first cry") and "epilogue" ("death") are included. The five acts are depicted in a way that corresponds with the notion of rising action reaching a climax at the end of the third act followed by a catastrophe that commences the falling action or reversal in the fourth and fifth acts. Fabiny describes Raleigh's emblematic treatment of *theatrum humanae vitae* in the second of the above poems as "a good example of the typographical [*sic*] way of seeing, in which perception is motivated by the grasping hidden analogies of this world" (283).

Pagan tradition provides several models for the temporal division of human life. The most basic of these is the bifurcation of life into the categories of youth and old age, which, as Fabiny points out, is often represented metaphorically in the

fundamental temporal and seasonal polarities of day and night, morning and evening, summer and winter. The most popular demarcation in pagan tradition, however, is sevenfold, and Fabiny attributes this model to Hippocrates in the fifth century BC. Each of the seven ages of life was said to correspond with one of the seven planets, a belief that was sustained into the early Christian era with the support of Chaldean astrology and Ptolemaic astronomy (294). In the pagan tradition the ages of man are conceived as “analogous to the ages of societies and empires” (295), and because history shows that empires come and go, the model is essentially cyclical. As Fabiny points out, Christianity replaces such a cyclical model with a linear one “because the incarnation meant a radical historical event that was not to be repeated” (299).

Christian tradition typically favoured a Pauline four-part division of human life “analogous to the ages of the world and the ages of human salvation” (295) and endorsed by the Church fathers. Fabiny points out, however, that “Augustine has an outstanding significance in that he established the multi-dimensional correspondences between the ages of man, the Biblical ages and the days of the week” (296). Augustine’s schema actually only incorporates six ages of man, each of which corresponds to one of the six days of Creation, and the six ages of the world from Adam through to the end of the world. The seventh day or age corresponds with the Second Coming and does not have an associated age of man in the schema, thus inviting an implicit correspondence with death such as that offered in the poem “De Morte”. The six actual ages of man offered by the Augustinian model are 1) *infantia*, 2) *pueritia*, 3) *adolescentia*, 4) *iuventus*, 5) *gravitas*, 6) *senectus veteris homini*. Fabiny notes the influence of this model throughout the Middle Ages, adding that “[t]he idea has also given impetus to the theme of ‘senectus mundi’ . . . [of] fundamental pessimism and the feeling that the present age was decadence” (298) while also noting that “[i]n the Reformation when the biblical way of thinking rejuvenated, the idea of the ‘world-week’ became an influential doctrine in the protestant [*sic*] eschatological thought” (298). *Senectus mundi* will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Iconographic, Emblematic, and Hieroglyphic Representations of *Theatrum Humanae Vitae***

Fabiny cites a book known as the *Tablet of Cebes*, a moral treatise attributed to a disciple of Socrates and written around 390 BC, as the “most ancient iconographic description of the world and of human life as a stage” (301). He also observes the strong influence that the book had on woodcuts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Fabiny, Jean-Jacques Bissard’s *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* printed in Metz in 1596, with engravings by Theodor De Bry, is the “best known emblematic presentation of the theatre as a metaphor of human life” (302). It is described as follows: “The front page . . . depicts four scenes representing four stages

of human life: it shows death striking an infant in its cradle, tapping a bridegroom upon its shoulder, creeping up upon a middle-aged merchant and digging a grave for an old man” (302). Fabiny also draws our attention to an emblem attached to the first chapter of the book, which is entitled “*Vita humana est tanquam Theatrum omnium miserarium*” or “Human life is a theatre of all miseries” (302-3).

The Renaissance saw a revival of classical, cyclical views of the ages of man, and Fabiny claims to have demonstrated an organic relationship between *theatrum mundi* and what he calls “the wheel of time” (303) or, as Feste in *Twelfth Night* prefers, “the whirligig of time” (V.i.376). The cyclic rotation of nature provides a model for a four-stage model of the ages of man based on the four seasons. Yet the seven-stage model corresponding to each of the seven planets remains dominant in the Renaissance. Fabiny cites a design in which “time represented as Saturn turns the whole world upon his wheel” (303). Also mentioned is a lost Florentine fresco from around 1554 which Fabiny summarises as follows: “[i]n the fresco each human age was associated with a planet, one of the seven virtues, one of the seven liberal arts, one of the seven deadly sins and with miscellaneous abstractions” (304-5). Fabiny uses the following diagram of the typology purportedly depicted in the fresco:

AGE	PLANET	VIRTUES	ARTS
1. Infancy	Moon	Charity	Grammar
2. Boyhood	Mercury	Faith	Logic
3. Adolescence	Sun	Hope	Music
4. Youth	Venus	Temperance	Rhetoric
5. Manhood	Mars	Prudence	Philosophy
6. Old Age	Jupiter	Fortitude	Astrology
7. Decrepitude	Saturn	Justice	Geometry

A similar schema of correspondence between the seven ages and the seven planets is adopted by Raleigh in the following passage from Book 1 (Chapter 2, Section 5, Page 31) of *The History of the World* (1614):

Our infancy is compared to the Moon, in which we seem only to live and grow, as plants, the second age to Mercury, wherein we are taught and instructed, our third age to Venus, the days of love, desire, and vanity, the fourth to the sun, the strong, flourishing, and the beautiful age of man’s life, the fifth to Mars, in which we seek honour and victory, and in which our thoughts travail to ambitious ends, the sixth age is ascribed to Jupiter, in which we begin to take accompt of our times, judge of ourselves, and grow to the perfection of our understanding, the last and the seventh to Saturn, wherein our days are sad and overcast, and in which we find by dear and lamentable experience, and by the loss which never be repaied, that of our vain passions and affections past, the sorrow only abideth. (*Works* Vol.2 60; Fabiny 305-6; Chew 165)



Fabiny completes his survey of the iconography of *theatrum mundi* and *theatrum humanae vitae* with a diagram based on Francis Quarles’s popular emblem-book *Hieroglyphikes of the Life of Man* (1638) containing engravings by William Marshall. Once again, the seven planets provide the main nodes of correspondence for the seven ages or decades of the typical human life span, while the associated hieroglyphic signs provide a useful reference for considering possible nuances implied by the use of such images in poetry and may aid in identifying subtle references to the *theatrum humanae vitae* topos. Fabiny remarks, “[t]he constant element of Quarles’ emblem-book is the candle representing the human soul which is unlit at the beginning but will later be lit by God’s hands” (306).

AGE	PLANET	HIEROGLYPHIC SIGN
1. Infancy (X)	Moon	embryo, cradle
2. Childhood (XX)	Mercury	peacock, prancing horse, primroses in bloom
3. Adolescence (XXX)	Venus	bow, arrow, goat, grape, vine
4. Youth (XL)	Sun	oak-tree, Apollo’s bay tree, lyre, boar
5. Maturity (L)	Mars	wind, sword, some falling leaves
6. Old age (LX)	Jupiter	skeleton, snake, falling leaves
7. Death (LXX)	Saturn	setting sun, crumbling house, leafless tree

*Contemptus Mundi*

The main rhetorical force of the ages-of-man or *Theatrum humanae vitae* topos is that of *memento mori*: a reminder of the brief, ephemeral nature of life and the inevitability of death, which may strike us down in any of life’s various stages. Such contemplation draws attention to the futility of the things human beings tend to value in life, such as wealth, honour, and physical pleasure. It is not surprising, then, that the ages-of-man figure has a long tradition of use as an argument against preoccupation with secular concerns and advocating a contemplative, spiritual existence. By developing a healthy hatred of the world, or *contemptus mundi*, the spiritual aspirant ought to be able to lay aside those distractions that are likely to prevent one from attaining a state of divine grace. Many sincere believers, however (including Saint Augustine, a major source for Donne’s sermons), do not find it easy to forego worldly ambition and pleasure, opting instead to defer absolute piety while at the same time seeking it. It is the conflict between these two drives or value systems that Donne is

lamenting when in the opening line of one of the *Holy Sonnets* he exclaims, “Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one”. In this sense, *contemptus mundi* develops into more than a simple refutation of the world, becoming rather a contempt for one’s own worldliness, hating oneself for loving that for which it would be better to feel only contempt.

The beginning of *contemptus mundi* as a predominant world view is to be found in the twelfth century, a period in western Europe that, like the Renaissance, saw a sudden intensification of creative energy, expressed particularly in literature and architecture. The great literary work most responsible for the dissemination of the cult of *contemptus mundi* is the *De miseria humanae conditionis* written at the end of the twelfth century by Pope Innocent III. This was widely read up to the seventeenth century and covers, among others, themes such as the indignity of birth, the body as the prison of the soul, the discomfort of old age, the agony of dying, and the putrefaction of corpses (Howard 56). As well as displaying a close affinity with the *theatrum humanae vitae* topos, these themes are among the many recurring preoccupations encountered in Donne’s sermons.

In a short essay entitled “Quoting Poetry Instead of Scripture: Erasmus and Eucherius on *Contemptus Mundi*” (1983), E. Rummel draws comparisons between two epistolary treatises on the subject of *contemptus mundi*. The earlier of the two is by Eucherius, the fifth-century bishop of Lyon. The later, by Erasmus, was published in 1521 (the earlier work was also published by Erasmus, and Rummel’s argument hinges on the assertion that Eucherius’s epistle was the model Erasmus used when composing his treatise). Both works are attempts to persuade their addressees to “foresake [*sic*] worldly ambitions and embrace instead a monastic life” (503). Both identify wealth, the pleasures of the flesh, and public honour as the three forms of secular impediment to spiritual development. The attainment of riches merely breeds the desire for more of the same, the pleasures of the flesh are insubstantial because the beauty perceived in “painted faces” is a “sham” (504), and fame and honour are short-lived and available to the good and the wicked alike (505).

The fundamental distinction Rummel observes between the early medieval and the Renaissance treatments of the *contemptus mundi* theme is that “[w]hile Eucherius seeks his inspiration in the Bible and gives his explanation a theological overtone, Erasmus [also] relies on popular wisdom and the moral philosophy contained in classical literature” (506). Virgil, Horace, Plato, Cicero, and Ovid are used by Erasmus along with biblical sources from Saint Paul and Saint Matthew. Such is his reappraisal of the pagan philosophers, repugnant to medieval Christian thought, that he argues that hedonism does not mean living as a profligate, adulterer, spendthrift, or drunkard, but rather that Epicure “counselled men to choose pleasures free of negative consequences: that is, intellectual rather than spiritual” (507). Such distinctions spill over into the

debate as to what it means to say that Donne was a “libertine”: does the term refer to a scholarly advocacy of religious tolerance or to a propensity for debauchery? I suggest that the judicious commentator will tend to opt for the former.

In Donne’s sermons there are several passages that combine *contemptus mundi* with explicitly theatrical references. The theatre epitomises the gaudy distractions of the world to such an extent that allusion to it is often literal and not metaphorical. And even if it were not sinful in itself, an appetite for such secular pleasures would nonetheless have the detrimental effect of providing false or outward comfort and consolation, thus distracting the spiritual seeker from difficult realities that must be faced: namely death, putrefaction, and the ever-present possibility of eternal damnation. At times Donne the preacher seems fairly tolerant, almost condoning secular distractions in a manner similar to that of Erasmus regarding hedonism: “To seek the ‘relief of outward comforts, of music, of mirth, of drink, of comedies, of conversation’ is not ‘unlawful,’ he [Donne] says; ‘such recreations’ have their place, for ‘the mind hath her physic as well as the body’” (Harris 1962 260-61); “the more we eate, the more temperate we are, and the more we drinke, the more sober” (Potter and Simpson V:275, 14:272). On other occasions his tone is less liberal, and benign forms of recreation become “unprofitable curiosities, unrevealed mysteries, and inextricable perplexities” (V:276, 14:293), as the following excerpts demonstrate: “and we sacrifice for that [i.e. dejection of spirit], to wine, and strong drinke, to musique, to Comedies, to conversation, and to all *Iobs* miserable comforters” (VIII:305, 13:490); “it [Jerusalem] is a place full of mutinous soldiers, of licentious prostitutes, of Players and Jesters” (IX:210, 8:787). The theatre is thus numbered among other vices pursued by the worldly. All of these have in common the fact that they are short-term ameliorative distractions from the inevitable reality of suffering and death, and none is quite what it appears to be on the surface.

### ***Senectus Mundi* and the Decay of Nature**

I have already briefly mentioned the *senectus mundi* trope, which is a manifestation of the fundamentally pessimistic feeling that the present age is the last, that time is running out and the world is in a state of decay analogous to the last of the seven ages of man in which infirmity and senility set in and devalue existence. Rummel notes that Eucherius uses the “ageing world” metaphor, and that “he places it within the framework of the Christian eschatological tradition, quoting I Cor 10: ‘we, in whom the centuries have come to an end’” (506). Erasmus, meanwhile, finds similarly pessimistic accounts of the world’s alleged state of demise in Christian as well as classical sources from mythology and ancient history. Whereas the *theatrum humanae vitae* metaphor operates in a relation of macrocosm-as-vehicle to microcosm-as-tenor (as simile: a human life [tenor] is like a play, or a week, or the history of the world [vehicle]), *senectus mundi* reverses the dynamics of the relation with macrocosm as the tenor and

microcosm as vehicle (as simile: the decaying world [tenor] is like an old man [vehicle]). In other words, in *theatrum humanae vitae* mankind is the tenor; in *senectus mundi* mankind is the vehicle; in *theatrum mundi*, as we have seen, tenor and vehicle can be reversible.

In *All Coherence Gone: A Study of the Seventeenth Century Controversy over Disorder and Decay in the Universe* (1949), Victor Harris observes that by 1600 the belief prevailed that the decay of nature, which was understood to be the result of God's curse upon the earth following the Fall, had extended to the entire universe. Our sun and the other stars of the night sky were now deemed inconstant, mortal and moribund. Indeed, this cosmic pessimism, defended in Godfrey Goodman's 1616 treatise *The Fall of Man, or the Corruption of Nature*, prevailed for over two decades before serious challenge in 1627 by George Hakewill in *An Apologie of the Power and Providence of God*. Harris finds little in the way of imagery based on the idea of a decaying world in English poetry before Spenser, and notes that, despite his "hydroptic melancholy" (119) Donne's attitude toward *senectus mundi* was on the whole ambivalent when considered diachronically throughout his writing life:

Donne's interest in the problem of decay develops in his middle and later years and is documented principally by the two *Anniversaries* and by many passages throughout the sermons. In the *Juvenalia*, or *Paradoxes and Problemes*, he even defends the thesis that "Good is as ever it was, more plenteous, and must of necessity be *more common than Evil*," professing himself to be "pittifully tired" of the vanity of "silly" old men who find the present age in a state of decline: "Alas! they betray themselves, for if the *times be changed*, their manners have changed them." In the first *Paradox*, Donne praises inconstancy—particularly in women but also in the world as a whole. Change, in whatever terms described, is not to be confused with change for the worse. (124)

Apart from fleeting references to the concept of *senectus mundi* in *Satire III* ("Kind pity chokes my spleen") and *Satire V* ("Thou shalt not laugh in this leaf, muse") and *Elegy XVII* ["Variety"], and more extended use of the topos in "The Progress of the Soul", Harris considers that "An Anatomy of the World", or *The First Anniversary*, "is the only poem in which Donne develops the whole pattern of a decaying world" (127), albeit that "the death of young Elizabeth Drury proves too slight a basis to support or justify the image of universal corruption, [and consequently] the elegy is not always artistically valid and is at times even grotesque" (125). The title is suggestive of a post-mortem, linking medical imagery with the *senectus mundi* topos in the manner of Raleigh's "diseases" that "clog" and "trouble" the elderly. Harris takes the title of his book from the following passage of "An Anatomy of the World", which is bristling with imagery of the relentless demise of the universe since the Fall. The reference to "new Philosophy" (205) links *senectus mundi* with the sense of phenomenological scepticism that also prevailed at the time Donne was writing:

Then, as mankinde, so is the worlds whole frame  
 Quite out of joynt, almost created lame:  
 For, before God had made up all the rest,  
 Corruption entred, and deprav'd the best:  
 It seis'd the Angels, and then first of all  
 The world did in her Cradle take a fall,  
 And turn'd the braines, and tooke a generall maim  
 Wronging each joynt of th'universall frame.  
 The noblest part, man, felt it first; and than  
 Both beasts and plants, curst in the curse of man.  
 So did the world from the first houre decay,  
 The evening was beginning of the day,  
 And now the Springs and Sommers which we see,  
 Like sonnes of women after fifty bee.  
 And new Philosophy cal's all in doubt,  
 The Element of fire is quite put out;  
 The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit  
 Can well direct him, where to looke for it.  
 And freely men confesse, that this world's spent,  
 When in the Planets, and the Firmament  
 They seeke so many new; they see that this  
 Is crumbled out againe to his Atomis.  
 'Tis all in pieces, all cohærence gone;  
 All just supply, and all Relation: (191-214)

When Donne uses phrases of such as “the worlds whole frame” and “each joynt of th'universall frame” we are reminded of Shakespeare’s “wooden O”, referring to the jointed timber frame of the Globe playhouse. Similarly, the imagery Donne uses to depict the decaying universe is reminiscent of Hamlet’s equally pessimistic and self-consciously theatrical, or metadramatic, (because it essentially describes the elaborately decorated interior of the theatre in which the actor would have spoken it) exclamation:

this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire: why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours” (II.ii.295).

The phrase “almost created lame”, meanwhile, reminds us of Gloucester’s

Deform’d, unfinish’d, sent before my time  
 Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
 And that so lamely and unfashionable  
 That dogs bark at me as I halt by them . . . (*Richard III* I.i.20-3)

Richard III is perhaps Shakespeare’s most unashamedly self-dramatising character, and Fabiny concludes his essay with an extensive analysis of how the complex metaphor of *theatrum mundi*, “the ‘player and his world’ . . . [functions] as a structuring principle operating throughout the play” (308 ff).

The pessimistic view of the world in “An Anatomy of the World” carries over into the sermons, as does the subtly theatrical and architectural imagery of the “whole

frame of the world”, here put to the kind of didactic use upheld by defenders of the theatre:

As the world is the whole frame of the world, God hath put into it a reproofe, a rebuke, lest it should seem eternall, which is, a sensible decay and age in the whole frame of the world, and every piece thereof. The seasons of the yeare irregular and distempered; the Sun fainter, and languishing; men lesse in stature, and shorter-lived. No addition, but only every yeare, new sorts, new species of wormes, and flies, and sicknesses, which argue more and more putrefaction of which they are engendred. (Potter and Simpson 6:324, 16:452-9; Harris 1949 128)

The idea of the ageing world as a kind of “reproof” lends the passage more optimistic connotations than may appear at first glance. Cosmic decay is thereby seen as God’s educational tool for our spiritual edification; as Harris points out, “[d]eath and destruction are not all, however, for the punishments are directed to our repentance, and the evils of this world are resolved in the glories of the next” (129).

### The Ages of Man in *Death’s Duell*

Donne’s final sermon, subtitled *A Consolation of the Soule, against the dying Life, and living Death of the Body* and, ostensibly at least, an explication of Psalm 68:20 “And unto God the Lord belong the issues of death. i.e. from death”, includes the following passage which contains his most thorough treatment of the (seven) ages-of-man topos as a poignant example of *memento mori* or the theme of *Ubi sunt qui ante nos* (“Where are those who went before us?”):

That which we call life, is but *Hebdomada mortium*, a week of deaths, seaven dayes, seaven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seaven times over; and there is an end. *Our birth dyes* in infancy, and our *infancy dyes* in youth, and youth and the rest dye in age, and age also dyes, and *determines all*. Nor doe all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth arise so, as a *Phoenix* out of the ashes of another *Phoenix* formerly dead, but as a *waspe* or a *serpent* out of a *caryon*, or as a *Snake* out of *dung*. Our youth is worse then our infancy, and our age worse then our youth. Our youth is hungry and thirsty, after those sinnes, which our infancy knew not; And our age is sory and angry, that it cannot pursue those sinnes which our youth did. And besides, al the way, so many deaths, that is, so many deadly calamities accompany every condition, and every period of this life, as that death it selfe would bee an ease to them that suffer them. Upon this sense doth *Iob* wish that *God had not given him* an issue from the first death, from the wombe, *Wherefore hast thou brought me forth out of the wombe? O that I had given up the Ghost, and no eye had seen me; I should have been, as though I had not been.* (Potter and Simpson X:234-5, 11:164-81)

Stanley Fish argues that all versions of the ages-of-man topos prior to this treatment by Donne share two characteristics that he considers constant: “it is a device for the making of distinctions, and it is a figure of progression. Often the distinctions are qualitative and the progression is from weakness to strength, before returning in a circle to

weakness" (1972 55). The passage from *Death's Duell* is, Fish claims, a departure from the standard literary convention:

Donne empties the topos of its confessional associations in two swift and decisive maneuvers: first its distinguishing force is taken away, when the last age is made the essence of every age; and then, not content merely to arrest movement, he reverses it. Maturity brings the maturing of sin and more deadly calamities follow upon the calamities we have already known. The effect is all the more powerful (and distressing) because the framework of the topos is not abandoned; it remains as an area to be negotiated, but without the sense of progression that makes its negotiation a source of satisfaction. In short, the topos becomes a prison. (56)

Fish introduces speech act theory into his interpretation of Donne's use of *theatrum humanae vitae* when he discerns the illocutionary force of a promise in the line "Yet *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis*, with *God the Lord are the issues of death*" (1972 59; Potter and Simpson X:235, 11:202-3). The promise is of the satisfaction of release "from the cycle of daily and hourly dyings" but the structure of Donne's sermon hinges on the breaking of that promise, of which the reader becomes aware at the beginning of the next paragraph, beginning with the ominous rhetorical question "But then is that the end of all?" (X:235, 11:211). Fish claims that *Death's Duell* is a brilliant example of the Anglican sermon precisely because it "consistently defaults on all its promises" (75). The implicit, infelicitous speech act, moreover, provides a commentary on the sermon's rhetorical structure that is nothing if not a metadramatic (or meta-homiletic) self-reflexive enactment of its own processes:

This last reversal should disabuse us of any remaining confidence we may have had in temporal and discursive forms; they have helped us neither to escape nor to understand. Once more we are remanded back to prison just when release seemed imminent, and this second remanding, more peremptory and (apparently) final than the first, brings into sharp and pressuring focus the three prominent patterns of the sermon: the periodic defaulting of the argument to the verse it was to have explained; the persistent short-circuiting of our normal modes of discursive response (by ends that are beginnings, progressions that go backward, etc.); and the refusal of the sermon to move toward a conclusion. (59-60)

Fish's references to prisons in both passages quoted above echo the sermon's imagery of confinement in the womb (Potter and Simpson X:232-3, 11:69-131) and foreshadow further, explicit prison imagery (X:241, 11:435). Images of both confinement and bondage are present in the following passage which emphasises the womb-prison metaphor while combining it strikingly with other fundamentally spatial images of the deathbed, the grave, and the courtroom:

Wee have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up in that *winding sheet*, for wee come to *seeke a grave*; And as prisoners discharg'd of actions may lie for fees; so

when the *wombe* hath discharg'd us, yet we are bound to it by *cordes* of flesh, by such a *string*, as that wee cannot goe thence, nor stay there. (X:233, 11:126-131).

Readers will also be reminded that the opening of Donne's sermon is configured around the extrapolation of an extended architectural metaphor incorporating "*foundations*", "*butteresses*", and "*contignations*" (X:230, 11:230). Architectural imagery is, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, a key spatial aspect of *theatrum mundi*, and prisons are figurative analogues of Plato's cave, invoking a sense of surreality, shadow-play, and phenomenological uncertainty. In fact, the image of the prison provides a spatio-temporal metaphor because a prison is a place one typically associates with temporal rather than spatial units of measurement, hence the modern usage according to which one "does time". Admittedly, the building Donne refers to is a rhetorical abstraction and is not defined, although the inclusion of the reference to buttresses is indicative of a church, cathedral, or abbey. The etymology of the key phrase of the verse from the Psalm that heads the sermon, moreover, provides a link to the passage alluding to the ages-of-man topos. Directly after the architectural imagery in the opening paragraph, Donne reiterates the phrase "issue(s) of death" in Latin, which reads "*exitus mortis*". This foreshadows the *theatrum humanae vitae* section of the sermon, which he leads into with the variation "*exitus a morte*", or "issue from death" (X:233, 11:123-4), and the change of preposition from "of" to "from" carries the force of a promise of satisfaction and final release as identified by Fish. "*Exitus*" functions as a theatrical pun that prepares us for the seven-ages-of-man passage in a manner very similar to Jaques's "They have their exits and their entrances". Similarly, reference to "our threescore and ten years of life" (X:233, 11:132-3) renders the passage that follows inevitable. Indeed, on a sub-structural level it, too, is a promise that that the familiar topos will follow, a promise that Donne does not quite keep, however, because his variation of *theatrum humanae vitae* breaks with convention. Architectural imagery returns in the form of an allusion to Job 14.2 and the "many mansions" of heaven (X:233-4, 11:137-44). Finally, before launching into the passage on the *Hebdomada mortium* or week-of-deaths, Donne uses the architectural image of the mansions of heaven as a contrast to the insubstantiality of life on earth. Humankind is effectively homeless, and life is therefore "but a *journey*, but a *peregrination* . . . a *pilgrimage*" (X:234, 11:154-9). Thus it can be seen that Donne's sermon incorporates the spatial imagery of architecture and the spatio-temporal imagery of prisons and journeys to supplement the essentially temporal topos of the seven ages of man. Spatial aspects of *theatrum mundi*, including playhouse architecture, cosmology, cartography, and the metropolis, are covered in the next chapter.



## Chapter Six

### Spatial Dimensions of *Theatrum Mundi*

As I have already suggested, the likelihood of the influence upon Donne of Shakespeare is not to be overlooked, despite the fact that connections suggested by critics covered in the first part of the study (Cruttwell, Leishman) are often tenuous and reducible to the notion that Shakespeare was a greater literary genius than Donne and must therefore have eclipsed his poetic ascendancy. The fact remains, however, that there is no evidence that Donne considered Shakespeare a rival; indeed it seems the ambitions of the two men were quite contrary. Donne refused to be seen to take himself seriously as a poet and claimed that he expected to be remembered for his prose, while Shakespeare, whose commercial interest was the staging of plays which he happened to write, expected to be remembered for his non-dramatic poetry. Perhaps the best (though contentious) indication that Donne felt competitive towards the dramatist lies in the fact that he never mentions him, either directly in the many letters that remain or more obliquely in the poetry. Parallels have been observed, nonetheless, between certain passages from Shakespeare's plays and Donne's poetry, usually with the assumption that the former was an influence upon the latter (see H.M. Richmond's "Donne's Master: The Young Shakespeare"). This chapter will concentrate on a field of influence that is not strictly literary but spatial and architectural, emanating principally from a study that develops a "poetics of theatrical space" in relation to the Elizabethan, and, specifically, Shakespearean, playhouse.

#### **The Poetics of Theatrical Space**

According to Kent T. van den Berg, "Shakespeare used his theater not only as a vehicle for dramatic poetry, but also as a metaphor of reality" (11). Van den Berg is concerned with Shakespeare's metadramatic world view, the use of the *theatrum mundi* topos to elicit audience response, the notion of performance itself as an extended non-verbal metaphor for the topos, and the way in which the topos, compounded by the emblematic significance of the Elizabethan and Jacobean public theatres, functions as "a model of the process of individuation by which the self is constituted in its relation to the world. . . . [and] the nature of artistic representation as a model of our own being" (12). Van den Berg sees the theatrical performance as a medium that rectifies a problematic erasure of presence, to ourselves and others, inherent in literary mimetic practice. That is not to say, however, that literary practice *per se* is not concerned with the restoration of presence:

By representing reality, a literary work both confirms and compensates for the suspension of presence inherent in literacy. Literature's representation of the

world for the mind's eye is almost always attended by its recreation of speech for the mind's ear. As Philip Sidney said, poetry is "a speaking picture". (13)

The reference to Sidney's *An Apologie for Poetrie* is particularly significant for the incorporation of Van den Berg's ideas into the study of *theatrum mundi* in Donne. The paradoxical concept of literary works working towards the healing of the wound they inflict is the ground upon which the notion of the "metaplay" is based. In other words, written discourse is an abnegation of presence, and therefore of the real world, that seeks to make up for that fissure by creating plausible other worlds that interact with the real world through oral performance. The model for this, according to Van den Berg, is Shakespeare's theatre, but such a model both depends upon and affects perceptions of non-dramatic poetry:

the playhouse itself defined the place of performance as a subjective world, corresponding to the Renaissance concept of the poem as a second nature created in the mind. This concept, superimposed on the traditional rhetorical understanding of poetry as a kind of oratory ("a speaking picture"), reflects a new view of poetry derived from reading and writing: a view of the poem as a thing or place, an enclosure or interior containing fictive experiences, a theater of the mind. (15)

I propose that Donne's lyric poetry, particularly the *Songs and Sonets*, contains evidence of such a "new view" of "the poem as a thing or a place" based on the kind of superimposition of a literary and spatial sensibility upon the oratory concept of the "speaking picture". This view lends a sense of autonomy to the individual poem, which perhaps helps explain why Donne should have become the ideal mascot of the New Critics.

A key feature of Van den Berg's theory is that "play and reality are not positive but dialectical terms: they are defined by their relation to each other" (16). This dialectical relationship is complicated by what Van den Berg calls "the principal of replication" whereby reality is subject to the "problematic" and often "inaccessible" phantoms of "appearance and illusion" (16) which, as any phenomenological sceptic or anyone who has ever been deceived will confirm, are not confined to the fictional worlds of plays. Certainly, much use of the *theatrum mundi* topos is made to illustrate the distinction between appearance and reality, thus exploiting a tradition of "antitheatrical prejudice" (16). Such a polarity is specious, however, as Shakespeare emphasises by making it, according to Van den Berg, his most pervasive theme, thus telescoping the distinction between real life and play-acting into that between the multiple worlds often depicted and contained within the play itself.

The telescopic rather than discrete relations obtaining between appearance and reality are multiplied by the Elizabethan playhouse itself as an enclosed architectural

structure, a structure that is echoed in the dramatic structure of individual plays through elements such as character development, disguise, mistaken identity, plays within plays, and alternating settings.

Play and reality are related at three different levels: (1) the theatrical event as a whole is held apart from reality beyond the playhouse walls; (2) within the playhouse, the immediate activity of playing and pretending shared by actors and spectators is metaphorically related to the play's image of life; (3) within that dramatic image, the characters distinguish and relate worlds presented as "play" and "reality": country and city, tavern and court, holiday and every day, green world and normal world. The first two levels are defined in spatial terms by the architecture of the playhouse; the third is established in the temporal dimension of dramatic action through the patterns of withdrawal and return. These three levels, though distinct, are analogous and reinforce one another, so that the theatrical occasion is deeply implicated in the imaginary world of the play. (19)

Van den Berg identifies a certain amount of interplay between the spatial and temporal dimensions of the three levels of relations obtaining between play and reality. I shall use the spatial/temporal dichotomy in a slightly different way to explicate what I consider the two main branches of *theatrum mundi*: the spatial dimension of playhouse architecture, cartography, and cosmic iconography; and the temporal dimension embodied in the ages-of-man topos. The remainder of this chapter will deal with the first of these.

### **Playhouse Architecture and Cosmic Iconography**

In his outline of the concept of a poetics of theatrical space, Van den Berg asserts that the theatre-world metaphor is grounded in architectural theory. Citing Rudolf Arnheim's *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, Van den Berg adopts the premise that "the design of a building is the spatial organization of thoughts about its functions" (23; also see Yates 189). Having said that, Van den Berg proposes that "the [Shakespearean] playhouse was a discordant combination of two very different structures, joined together for commercial, not aesthetic reasons. Here, Van den Berg's theory of Elizabethan and Jacobean stage architecture is at odds with that of Frances A. Yates, who proposes what she admits is a controversial theory (now generally discredited) of the influence of the Roman architect Vitruvius on the design of the English public theatre, an influence that she argues is passed down through Palladio and the English Renaissance philosophers John Dee and Robert Flood, and Inigo Jones, the architect and designer of court masques, who came to be known as the "Vitruvius Britannicus" (81).

In arguing that the English public playhouse was a "discordant combination", Van den Berg refutes the notion of such a classical architectural heritage. He observes that the London theatres: the Theatre, Curtain, Globe, Fortune, Swan, and Hope were built not by architects but "by carpenters, like James Burbage, Peter Street, or Gilbert

Katherens, who knew from workshop traditions, rules of thumb, and available precedents the one right way to build any given structure; for them originality of design was no virtue” (24). The innovative quality of the design of these early public English theatres was no more than a coincidence of combination based purely on commercial expedience and a *bricolage* of existing components. These components are, respectively, the round edifices that were built as gaming houses on the banks of the Thames and used for bear baiting, and the square or rectangular raised platform or stage taken from the Tudor hall and the Court masque tradition. Yates bases her theory on alleged similarities between playhouse architecture, triangulations within the zodiac upon which the theatres of antiquity were designed, and the geometry of the circle and the square as a basis for a theory of proportion dating back to Vitruvius and illustrated in drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and Henry Cornelius Agrippa (23-4, 189). For Van den Berg, however, these parallels are purely coincidental.

That is not to say, however, that the concept of a round enclosure containing a four-sided promontory is lacking in significance for Van den Berg. The first significant feature he notes is that the theatre “had to accommodate only a single event, the performance, that involved all of its inhabitants at the same time, instead of the disparate, independent, and sometimes conflicting activities that most buildings contain” (26). Secondly, he notes, they “were free-standing, self-enclosing structures that were not, and did not need to be, integrated with the environment of neighboring buildings” (26). Borrowing from the architectural and spatial theory of David Burrows, Karl Jaspers, Gaston Bachelard, and Arnheim, Van den Berg suggests that it is in the inherent nature of an enclosed space, or interior, to seem round on a perceptual, phenomenological level (26-7). He uses this concept, actualised in the shape of the Shakespearean playhouse (indoor theatres were oblong and early public theatres square), to argue for an implied “analogy between the interior of a building and the internal world of the self” (27). Ultimately, he sees the playhouse as a “heterocosm” or second world that highlights liminal perspectives and inward subjectivity: “The circular shape of the playhouse emphasizes the subjective, inner-directed quality of any theatrical space; the spectators were seated, or stood, with their backs to the circumference, facing the center of the interior” (28). The imposing cylindrical dimensions, autonomy from other structures, and location of the theatres on the South Bank and therefore outside the City of London also rendered the theatres suitable metaphors for the self-conscious isolation of the individual subject. Whether the cosmic emblem of the playhouse is indeed inherent in its circular auditorium or, alternatively, in its square or rectangular stage is a matter for conjecture and is discussed by Van den Berg, who notes that the former is often considered to be modelled on the Roman amphitheatre, while the latter is said to be the descendent of the Tudor hall, and, before that, the medieval scaffold (49). In any case, as Van den Berg observes, “[t]he circular

auditorium evokes feelings of freedom and power as readily as the rectangular stage evokes feelings of order and limit" (50).

Van den Berg attributes much of the anti-stage sentiment preached by certain eminent Puritans such as John Stockwood and Stephen Gosson to the opening of the new public playhouses. Both used the ancient Roman amphitheatre to deride the modern edifices as pagan and diabolical. Thomas Heywood, however, would later invoke in his *Apology for Actors* the Roman amphitheatre as a model that testified to the "Ancient Dignity" of the English playhouses (29). Anti-stage rhetoric held that theatrical performance constituted a dangerous invocation of malign forces. Van den Berg recounts the story of Edward Alleyn (who later became Donne's son-in-law) deciding to retire as an actor after a performance of Marlowe's *Faustus* (he played the lead) in which he purportedly encountered and was threatened by "a real devil . . . among the counterfeit ones" (30).<sup>9</sup>

### Sidney's *An Apologie for Poetrie*

As Van den Berg notes, Gosson devoted the first two of his anti-theatrical tracts to Sir Philip Sidney, but these were far from well received by the latter, whose more refined Puritan ideals scorned such a lambasting of the popular theatre, even though he had reservations about it himself (30-1). *An Apologie for Poetrie* is cited by Van den Berg by way of a response to Gosson not because he believes Sidney had any particular respect or enthusiasm for the popular drama or its common actors, but because "the theater, as a metaphor, embodied what he most valued in poetry: its affective power and its imaginative independence" (31). Moreover, Sidney's famous assertion that the poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lyeth" is supported by the following allusion to play-going: "What childe is there that, comming to a Play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great Letters vpon an olde doore, doth beleue that it is *Thebes*?" (Van den Berg 31). Despite his careful distinction among genres, Sidney's response to Gosson strongly suggests that in the minds of the late Elizabethan *literati* an attack upon the theatre was tantamount to an attack upon poetry itself, so linked and interdependent were the current vogues in both verse and drama. Thus, Sidney provides a potent precedent for a poem-as-theatre metaphor encapsulated in Van den Berg's phrase "theater of the mind". Sidney advocates, moreover, the idea of the poet as a creator of things that actually surpass the wonders of creation, and Van den Berg suggests that "the concept of the poet as creator of a heterocosm emerges in Renaissance literary theory as a corollary to a new confidence in man's self-transforming power" (56, 58).

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<sup>9</sup> See John D. Jump's introduction to Methuen's The Revels Plays series edition of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* lxi-ii for a discussion of several versions, often circulated by those opposing the existence of the public theatres, of the "one devell too many" story.

## The Globe and the Theatre-as-World Metaphor

The poem or play thereby becomes, Van den Berg suggests, a heterocosm or second nature that is created by the poet or dramatist in an act of creation analogous to that of God. Such a dialogic model for artistic and divine creation replaces a more asymmetrical one: "In medieval theology, God is compared to a poet and the world to a poem, but always with the reservation that God's creating *ex nihilo* is essentially different from human making: 'the creature cannot create,' Augustine declares" (32). Indeed, the masque, with a God-like monarch its centre, is a particularly clear example of the world as a (cosmic) theatre. In the Renaissance, however, the distinction between creator and creature becomes blurred, thanks in part to Sidney's *Apologie* and Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589). Just as God may now be perceived as a poet, so the poet may be considered a kind of god (32). Parallel to this development is that of a simultaneously complementary and converse variation upon Van den Berg's main premise defining "the playhouse as an architectural emblem of the cosmos" (32). Just as with the God-poet/poet-God symmetry, so we are forced to consider the notion that if, metaphorically speaking, the world is a theatre, as the opening lines of the poem prefixing Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* asserts ("The world's a theatre, the earth's a stage, / Which God, and nature doth with actors fill"), then the theatre must be considered a little world. This inversion of the conventional metaphor is what Shakespeare's company had in mind, Van den Berg argues, when they named their new playhouse the Globe and inscribed upon it the motto *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (33). The Globe, of course, replaced the Theater, and, as Van den Berg notes, Thomas Dekker in *The Guls Horne Booke* (1609) refers to the former building as a "*Theater du monde*". Van den Berg also cites Abraham Ortelius's famous atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, which first appeared in 1570, as a likely source of the name of the older playhouse, adding that the significance of the change of name from The Theater to The Globe "shifts the emphasis within the *theatrum mundi* idea from the world itself to a man-made model or equivalent of the world" (34). Also relevant to such a shift are the model globes constructed by Gerhardus Mercator in 1541, which were succeeded by larger counterparts made by Emery Molyneux in 1592. As well as a useful instrument for navigation, Van den Berg suggests, the globe symbolises the idea "that the entire world could be brought under the dominion of human will" (34). He also notes that the title page of Mercator's 1595 atlas depicts "Atlas as a cosmographer who has set down the earth at his feet in order to inscribe its features on a blank globe, making (as Donne would say) 'On a round ball / . . . That, which was nothing, *All*'" (34; the reference is to "A Valediction: of Weeping" [10-13]). Mercator appeals to what Van den Berg terms the "phenomenology of roundness" in which the sphere represents not so much eternity or perfection as "the mind's desire for total knowledge" (34).

Van den Berg highlights what he considers the difference between a map and a globe, claiming that the former, as a cartographic “diagram of the cosmos [that] refers beyond itself to relationships that (presumably) exist in the actual world”; the latter, by contrast, “reproduces the world itself in miniature” (35). The difference therefore is between signification or representation and mimesis or replication. Van den Berg thereby discerns a significant perceptual shift: “The globe epitomizes an important moment in the history of consciousness: the separation of the mind as subject from the world as object” (35). This notion leads to a paradox which is illustrated by the picture of Hercules, or Atlas, bearing the world on his shoulders while also standing upon it that has been conjectured as the emblem displayed on the Globe playhouse (26). Van den Berg suggest that the paradox reverses “the usual relation of microcosm to macrocosm” (36) while, through what might be considered a quasi-narcissistic dynamics, “reduc[ing] the world to a mirror that merely reflects human preferences, a neutral object upon which any value can be imposed” (37).

### ***Theatrum Mundi and the Metropolis***

Turning his attention to the Globe’s reputed motto: *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (effectively “all the world’s a stage”), Van den Berg observes its special pertinence to the metropolitan setting of urban London, which, he argues, was also a kind of heterocosm. The relevance of the town-as-world metaphor is captured in the following quotation from Fernand Braudel:

Towns were marked by an unparalleled freedom. They had developed as autonomous worlds and according to their own propensities. They had outwitted the territorial state. . . . They ruled their fields autocratically. . . . They pursued an economic policy of their own (and created) protective privileges. . . . The formula so often used to describe this strong and privileged urban body can be repeated without misgivings; “The town is a world in itself”. (Braudel 396-8; quoted in Van den Berg 38).

Drawing on the work of anthropologist Richard Sennett, Van den Berg observes that urban societies are not communities in the sense of an “organic body” (39) but a collection of individuals, anonymous strangers, many of whom had migrated to the city alone and free of collective communal and family ties in order to find work. In this sense, he argues, “the urban social environment induces subjectivity and self-consciousness. In complex societies, it is important that a person learn to manipulate concepts and words, and to abstract ideas from immediate experience, even as he must learn to abstract himself from the group” (39). Such an imperative for abstraction and subjectification is consequently “attended by a theatrical sense of the self as an actor in life’s drama”:

This theatrical sense, as Sennett has demonstrated, is especially important in urban life. In the city, people must meet and communicate as strangers, without recourse to the richly circumstantial context of familial and communal ties that define and substantiate persons who live together in smaller groups and know one another intimately. In order to supply the missing context of communal life, Sennett argues, urban society provides a repertoire of fashions, manners, and conventional roles, and offers them as a medium of communication. He compares the problem of the urban citizen to that of the actor in a theater; both must find a way "to arouse belief in one's appearance among a milieu of strangers": "Social expression will be conceived of *as presentation* to other people of feelings which signify in and of themselves, *rather than as representation* of feelings present and real to each self" [Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, pp. 28-9, 38,40,39]. Social roles, like dramatic roles, must have significance and value apart from the unknowable inner feelings of the strangers who are actors and audience in the urban theater. (Van den Berg 40)

The conventional public roles adopted by the urban citizen give rise, Van den Berg argues, to the emergence of "the concept of the private self" (40) which is always differentiated from the public masks donned by the domestic face of the individual behind them. This is often experienced as a tension between appearance-versus-reality that lends a special resonance to the social dynamics of life in a metropolis. While the sources cited above can, perhaps, be accused of oversimplifying, even romanticising, agricultural economies, it is a fact that there was a striking amount of urban migration from rural areas in the late sixteenth century, with London's population doubling during Shakespeare's lifetime.

### ***Mappa Mundi* and the City-as-Stage**

The notion of the city-as-theatre proposed by Van den Berg is upheld by Martin Stevens in his essay "From *Mappa Mundi* to *Theatrum Mundi*: The World as Stage in Early English Drama". Stevens draws on the late Medieval tradition of "the urban festival drama and especially of the Corpus Christi play" to argue that "[t]he performance space that the civic structure appropriated for its play was, in fact, a *theatrum mundi*, the quintessential 'theater in the round'" (26). As Stevens observes, in the late Middle Ages either "the *entire* city or a central open space, most commonly the market place" served as playing space for processional performances (such as those of the Corpus Christi plays) and "fixed drama" respectively. In both types of performance, the staging of plays in which the public themselves re-enact such events as the Passion, is a ritualised and liminal holiday event, "an inversion of quotidian life . . . often marked by taboo" (27).

Stevens's project is to show a connection, not necessarily conscious but part of an "operative cultural memory" (26), between "the medieval outdoor stage and the Elizabethan playhouse" (25). The link which establishes such a connection, it is proposed, is the concept of the map, which, Stevens suggests, "constitute[s] one of the more interesting examples of the relation between discursive practices and material



reality” (28). The specific maps Stevens has in mind are examples from the late thirteenth century: the English Hereford map and the German Ebstorf map, both of which conform to the general design of the T-O map, standing for *orbis terrarum* but also depicting the two essential elements of configuration: the O representing the watery circumference, or *circumfluent*, and the T representing the boundaries between the upper hemisphere (Asia, above the crossbar of the T), the north (Europe, left of the ascender), and the south (Africa, right of the ascender) (28). Stevens notes that Jerusalem “marks the dead center of the world and is something of a microcosm of its larger context” (29). The medieval world map, or *mappa mundi*, is thus to be perceived not as an proportionally accurate analogue of geographical space, but rather as “an iconographic referent” (25) or “cosmic stage” (42). Appealing to the phenomenology of roundness, however, it will be observed that the most obvious connection between the *mappa mundi*, the configuration of the medieval city-stage and the Elizabethan playhouse is to be perceived in their common circularity (33).

Stevens notes the likely role of the *mappa mundi* model “as a guiding metanarrative to the *imago mundi* that governed the architectural program of the medieval cathedral” (31-2). In terms of *theatrum mundi*, he links one of the earliest uses of the word “theatre” in Middle English referring to a performance space in Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale”, observing “its resemblance to the architectural plan of the medieval city” (27). Stevens also cites a further model for his theory, noting similarities between the basic design of the T-O map and the early fifteenth-century manuscript of the stage plan for *The Castle of Perseverance* (34), thus providing a specifically theatrical link with the cartographic and architectural precursors. In addition, the conventional configuration of the medieval *mappa mundi*, especially when considered in connection to the Corpus Christi plays, may be perceived as a graphic signification of the body of Christ (39).

In his closing comments, Stevens reiterates his reluctance to suggest a conscious connection between either the Elizabethan playhouse and the medieval stage or the *mappa mundi*, cathedral design, and *theatrum mundi*. Rather, he proposes that these models provide for the Renaissance “a scheme, or an abstraction of a design, that governed its theatrical outlook and its dramaturgy” (42). The choice of the Lord Admiral’s Men, Shakespeare’s company at the time, in naming their new theatre The Globe is indicative of an awareness of such models, as is the convention by which it is assumed “that the performance space was cosmic and therefore infinitely adaptable to the spatial needs of the playwright’s imagination”(43). Such adaptability, deriving from the cosmic iconography of the medieval precursors is evident, Stevens concludes, in examples in Shakespeare of “critical metatheatrical play” in which “the stage is playfully and artfully deconstructed”, as well as the incorporation of the concepts of “universal time, space, and action” that allow for “a stage of fully open representation” (44) which

is succinctly problematised in the prologue of *Henry V*. Indeed, in asking his audience to pardon the “unworthy scaffold” (10) and its “flat unraiséd spirits” (9) Shakespeare’s chorus explains, with what I consider metadramatic irony, precisely how fully open representation of time, space, and action is in fact possible through the collusive, active participation of an audience willing to suspend disbelief, thus contributing its own co-creative “imaginary forces” (18) to the theatrical event:

For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here and there: jumping o’er times;  
Turning th’accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass: (28-31)

John Gillies sees in these words the direct influence of Ortelius and Mercator:

Shakespeare’s chorus harnesses speech to the geographical muse. This, as Ortelius understood, was a muse of the eye (‘geography is the eye of history’). . . . The eye, Mercator cautioned, was in the mind of course. And this is exactly Shakespeare’s point in the prologue to *Henry V*. In the very act of apologising for the visual inadequacy of his theatre, Shakespeare appeals directly to the geographic muse, conjuring a kaleidoscopic sequence of imagined scenes beyond the capacity of any known scenographic illusion to represent. (95)

Indeed, Gillies speaks of the atlas in architectural terms, linking it figuratively with the concept of a “Renaissance map room”; moreover he argues for the essentially “theatrical function” of the atlas which “epitomises the kind of architectural space needed to display a collection of wall-maps” (72). Gillies connects this architectural, theatrical aspect of *mappa mundi* with a Marlovian image of “infinite riches in a little room”, in which he also finds paralleled in Donne’s “The Canonization” in the line “We’ll build in sonnets pretty roomes”.

To summarise, in this chapter I have introduced spatial and architectural aspects of the *theatrum mundi* topos. These include the notion of the theatre as an emblem of the cosmos as perceived in the medieval morality play and the Shakespearean playhouse. These models give rise respectively to both architectural and cartographic dimensions of the world-stage metaphor. The concept of the globe, meanwhile, adds an element of precocious, material creativity to challenge those more emblematic modes of representation. Finally, the use of the city as a stage in the Middle Ages is complemented by the notion of the Renaissance city as a kind of theatre. In the next chapter I shall concentrate on the principles of “metadrama”, and the devices through which, quoting Van den Berg “the theatrical occasion is deeply implicated in the imaginary world of the play”. Such techniques are also used by Donne in his dramatic lyrics and are a chief constituent in his inferential dramatic economy as, I shall attempt to demonstrate in Chapter Eight.

## Chapter Seven

### Principles of Metadrama

This chapter begins with an outline of key principles of metadrama as proposed by Van den Berg: namely, the concepts of “replication” and “withdrawal and return” which combine to shape dramatic structure while blurring clear-cut bivalent distinctions between reality and the fictional play-world. Other metadramatic concepts to be discussed include the central figure of the actor; identity difference, and equivalence in mimesis; internalising the actor/role duality; the dynamics of soliloquy; and speech acts. The first of these issues, the principles of replication and withdrawal and return, are closely related to the dynamics of aesthetic mimesis and illusion-versus-reality. As I have already mentioned, the most conventional occurrences of the world-theatre metaphor are illustrative of the distinction between appearance and reality, the illusory and the true. Accordingly, on a human level it is also associated with such behavioural and character traits as deceit, insincerity, infidelity and hypocrisy. While these are commonplace aspects of what, as we have already seen, is a far more complex topos, and thus would have constituted something of a dated cliché by the time Donne was writing, such usage would nonetheless still have held a certain appeal in what some consider, albeit contentiously, to have been an age of great phenomenological scepticism. While it is altogether, perhaps, too neat a theory to accept outright as a given, it does seem reasonable to infer, however, that a degree of epistemological uncertainty would have obtained in the wake of the Copernican revolution, the Reformation, Montaignean humanism, and the emergence of new sciences that undermined old assumptions about the world which had been extrapolated from sensory perception.

### **Replication**

Van den Berg observes that “[w]hen the theater is defined as a second world, the primary distinction of play and reality is replicated both within play and within reality” (45). What he refers to as a process of “replication” is a Chinese-box or telescopic set of relations between reality, the theatre, the world of the play, and other worlds represented within that play-world. These relations, in many ways an expansion and multiplication of the concept of microcosm and macrocosm, are liminally defined. The walls of the playhouse separate it from the external world that contains it; similarly, the stage is a discrete entity within the auditorium; the drama itself is a mimetic representation of real life that is also autonomous insofar as conditions and events in the world of the play are not determined by the outside world, and vice-versa; the phenomenon of the play-within-a-play exhibits similar relations obfuscating the

fundamental distinction between the world of the play and the reality outside the theatre. Audience members, meanwhile, are caught in a kind of stasis between these two worlds, as they are temporarily cut off from the reality of their own lives while witnessing events on stage upon which they have no influence, hence what Van den Berg terms “an ambivalent barrier between actors and spectators” (63) which is reflected by the architectural relations obtaining between stage and auditorium. The theatre by its very nature challenges us to question so-called reality.

### **Withdrawal and Return**

According to Van den Berg, the *theatrum mundi* topos has a special, second order and self-reflexive status compared with other figures:

Any metaphor is a metaphor of mind, whatever its particular content, because it makes us aware that reality is transformed when it becomes an object in and for consciousness. The theatrical metaphor dramatizes this subjectivity. Unlike other basic metaphors . . . its substance is provided by a human mimetic activity that already represents reality, even before being appropriated as the vehicle of a metaphor. The theatrical metaphor reverses the mimetic relationship and gives it a reflexive structure: the stage represents a world that resembles a stage; the actor impersonates a character who plays the actor. (52)

The principally temporal manifestations of the reality-illusion polarity evident in the *theatrum mundi* meta-trope are the concepts of the play-within-a-play, role-play and character development. These elements are governed by metadramatic processes that Van den Berg calls “replication” and “withdrawal and return”. Replication, as we have seen, denotes the propensity of actual and possible worlds to project and contain other possible worlds that are at once mimetic representations of and autonomous states apart from the worlds containing them. Withdrawal and return, on the other hand, denotes a crossing of boundaries from world to world or character to character that is both a structuring principle and potential locus of deconstructionist aporia: “Efforts to preserve thought and metaphor from epistemological scepticism, from the collapse of otherness upon the self, generally rely on a dialectical process that begins with a withdrawal into subjectivity but culminates in a return to otherness” (53). Such a process may be observed in terms of both setting and character.

As far as setting is concerned, examples of withdrawal and return occur most obviously in Shakespeare’s pastoral comedies: “their action begins in a normal world, then moves to a green world of disguise, imagination, and metamorphosis, and finally returns to the normal world” (67). Because contrasts of setting occur within the time-line of dramatic action, they are a temporal phenomenon not to be confused with the spatial and concrete aspects of metadrama discussed in the previous section. According to Van den Berg, withdrawal into the “green world” or “unlocalized stage conveys a

sense that the world's stage has lost its substance and objectivity, and become such stuff as dreams are made of" (57). And dreams are a poignant analogue of the withdrawal process because they are always suggestive of the dramatic inevitability of return via waking; not surprisingly, dreams often provide a convenient metadramatic device for the withdrawal and return process in plays and other literary genres (Donne's "The Dreame", discussed in Chapter Eight, is a poignant example). Meanwhile, it should be noted that replication compounds and allows for an echoing of the process by which the playgoer temporarily leaves behind the outside world, or macrocosm: "[t]he characters' experience of withdrawal and return replicates within the play the spectators' experience of withdrawing to the playhouse, which is the actual realm of disguise, festivity, and deceptive shows" (67). It is as if the audience, in a reversal of Plato's cave analogy, willingly enters an arena of phenomenological uncertainty, and in so doing embraces the opportunity, indeed the necessity, of suspending disbelief. Such a conjunction between world and stage is facilitated, moreover, by the fact that "most of Shakespeare's opening scenes either have indeterminate settings or else presuppose the interior of a great hall, which the acting area may have resembled" (72).

Interestingly, such indeterminacy of setting in Shakespeare is often compensated for through a "curiously undramatic procedure: poetic description of the characters' world" (54). Van den Berg stresses that such passages of "verbal scenery" (he cites as examples the Chorus in *Henry V* and Enobarbus describing Cleopatra on her barge from *Antony and Cleopatra* II.ii.198-202, 212-19) are "quite gratuitous" and should not be equated with "the inadequate scenic resources of the Elizabethan stage" (54). Rather, he argues "Shakespeare uses verbal scenery to dramatize the subjective element in our relation to the world that is implicit in our capacity for fiction and play" (55). Such a tactic would have been grist to the mill for the "enemies of the stage" who would almost certainly have seen such a conjuring up of vivid imaginary worlds as a spiritually dangerous act akin to black magic and other practices considered diabolical or heretical. Van den Berg adds that the physical presence of the actors, themselves "visually overdetermined by elaborate, emblematic costumes" (56), offers an objectified "split image of the play's world" that privileges the characters over their insubstantial "verbal scenery", thus compounding the notion of human domain over the natural universe, and, by what many would deem blasphemous extension, over God (56).

### **The Central Figure of the Actor**

It is also in terms of character and performance that we may discern a further aspect of withdrawal. The centrality of the actor in Renaissance theatre as cosmic emblem is made apparent in one of John Webster's *Characters*, entitled "An Excellent Actor", which was possibly inspired by Richard Burbage's performances at the Globe: "By a full and significant action of body, [the actor] charmes our attention: sit in a full

Theater, and you will thinke you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the *Actor* is the *Center*” (Lucas IV 42; Van den Berg 27).<sup>10</sup> The fact that this concept, especially as worded by Webster, is represented in overtly spatial, even geometric terms, serves to demonstrate how the principles of metadrama may incorporate characteristics of *theatrum mundi* already discussed in the preceding chapters. And, as Van den Berg observes, a similar metadramatic portrayal of “the Herculean figure of the actor” (50) features in the following lines from *Antony and Cleopatra*:

His face was as the heav’ns, and therein stuck  
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted  
The little O, th’earth.

.....  
His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm  
Crested the world. (V.ii.79-81, 82-3)

The protean actor is thus presented centre stage and at the centre of the cosmic theatre where he enjoys god-like autonomy and scope for mobility. Van den Berg cites Sidney’s *Apologie* and Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on Human Dignity* to develop this image into the notion of “the metamorphic power of fiction [that] is epitomized by the actor” (59). For detractors of the theatre such as Gosson, however, actors are the ultimate emblem of the subversive power of all plays and poetry as they symbolise both capricious instability and the wilful manipulation of divine order. This aspect is not lost on the dramatist, either, and Van den Berg suggests that metadramatic incarnations of “the usurper as actor” (60), epitomised by Shakespeare’s Richard III, exploit such perceptions. A similar objectification of the metamorphic impulse applies, Van den Berg adds, “[w]hen characters in Renaissance fiction disguise themselves and play roles or are more deeply changed by the passions of love or madness” (60). Shakespeare uses this metadramatic dynamics to develop dramatic characterisation beyond “the two-dimensional types . . . inherited from literary and dramatic tradition” (60). The result is the emergence of numerous characters who are “inherently theatrical [insofar as they] disguise themselves and consciously play roles, while others undergo self-transformation at a deeper level of psychic change in response to the metamorphic pressures of love, ambition, guilt, rage, or madness” (60). Vindice, in Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, is a perfect example of the kind of self-transformation and role-play that Van den Berg identifies. It is interesting to note, moreover, that several of the critics I have covered in the first section of Part I who look to Donne’s personality and

<sup>10</sup> See also Chambers 4: 257-8 regarding the Burbage connection.

biography for sources of his dramaticity perceive similar “metamorphic pressures” in the poet’s psyche.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps it is not surprising that there should be certain similarities between the principles of Shakespearean metadrama and the perceived persona of one of the age’s most celebrated non-dramatic poets, especially one who, in his early adulthood, was obsessively concerned, as is generally accepted, with making profound changes to his own circumstances and identity. Donne’s apostasy, coyness about his poetic vocation, and ambition for secular and later spiritual advancement are all elements that strike a chord with Van den Berg’s claim that “Shakespeare’s theater actualized the central concepts of Renaissance poetics: just as the playhouse objectifies fiction’s independence as a heterocosm, through the ludic impulse the actor embodies the related idea of man’s self-transforming power” (60). Indeed, the power to transform oneself, or a proclivity for “self-fashioning”, is, according to Stephen Greenblatt, a key concern during the sixteenth century of certain “talented middle-class men [who] moved out of a narrowly circumscribed social sphere and into a realm that brought them in close contact with the powerful and the great” (1980 7). This description, of course, readily applies to the young John Donne (even though Greenblatt’s study of such men does not include him). It should also be noted that the notion of optimal self-fashioning informs our modern understanding of the term “Renaissance man”, epitomised, for Greenblatt, in the person of Sir Walter Raleigh. The same imperative, suggests Greenblatt in explicitly theatrical terminology, influenced “the ways in which major English writers of the sixteenth century created their own *performances*” (1980 256, my emphasis).

### **Identity, Difference, and Equivalence in Mimesis**

Withdrawal and return, Van den Berg argues, occurs in all forms of representational art. The mimetic process, moreover, is tripartite and, like the (Lacanian) psychoanalytical individuation process, incorporates three successive phases: identity, difference, and equivalence. When confronted with a painting of a tree, for example, our initial, momentary response is one of “naive” or “habitual” recognition, in which “we identify the painting with its object, looking right through the canvas at the tree”. This gives way to “a self conscious awareness of the painting as a mimetic artifact different from its object”. Strangely, it is this very awareness of the difference between object and representation that “reintroduce[s] the notion of an object ‘beyond’ the painting” (70) which now becomes “a metaphoric equivalent of reality” (71). The effect of art on nature is evident, Van den Berg suggests, in the observation that “[a]ctual trees look different after we have seen their counterparts in the paintings of Constable or Van Gogh” (70). What mimesis offers is a kind of “situated subjectivity”;

<sup>11</sup> John Carey’s *John Donne: Life, Mind, and Art* presents a compelling portrait of Donne in such a light. See my discussion of Carey, pp. 21-3.

the term is Hegelian, and there is more than a hint of the dialectic materialistic chain of thesis-antithesis-synthesis in Van den Berg's estimation that "[a] poem gains its relation to reality not only because it imitates nature but also because men imitate it" (71). In terms of Shakespearean drama, Van den Berg believes that the identity-difference-equivalence cycle corresponds to the (Aristotelian concept of the) "beginning, middle, and end of dramatic action" (71).

In its simplest form, Van den Berg points out, character development resolves in "the removal of disguise" (83) as in *Twelfth Night* when the disguised identical twins Viola and Sebastian meet and, in doing so, "seem to occupy a single character: 'one face, one voice, one habit, and two persons'" (V.i.208). Both are united in the fictitious person of Cesario, Viola's disguise alter-ego whom Sebastian is mistaken for and whom he even mistakes for himself in a kind of antithesis of narcissistic mirroring: "Do I stand there? I never had a brother" (V.i.218). Viola thinks Sebastian must be his own ghost, while Sebastian admits, as Van den Berg puts it, that "he is not himself but the actor of himself" (83): "A spirit I am indeed, / But am in that dimension grossly clad / Which from the womb I did participate" (V.i.228-30). The imagery he uses to represent his dual identity is reminiscent of a passage from Donne's "The Extasie", from which Van den Berg quotes in his summary of the subjective dynamics that Sebastian's situation exemplifies:

His response captures both halves of the Shakespearean character's dual nature: his inner freedom from all personal definition, and his confinement in and commitment to a body, sex, country, name, parentage, and all else that constitutes his "character." Character, however fully defined, is only a partial manifestation of the inner spirit; but, as Sebastian knows, the spirit is fulfilled only by assuming its character fully, "Else a great Prince in prison lies". (84)

This reference to Donne's poetry, I suggest, can be used as a starting point for a refutation of Chari's claim that Donne's characters are not dramatic because they tend to show no development within the poems.

### **Internalising the Actor/Role Duality**

Through the principle of replication, Van den Berg argues, "the duality of actor and role" (60) is complicated, indeed confounded and internalised, for in Shakespeare we commonly see an actor on stage playing a character who, in turn, is portraying someone other than who that character purports to be. Like that of Richard III, Macbeth's realism, according to Van den Berg, is inherent in his self-conscious and deconstructionist depiction of himself as an actor in a play through sustained theatrical allusion: "his lines absorb the duality of actor and role, making room for it in the fictive personality of the character" (62). The "ambivalent barrier between actors and spectators" (63) that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is also internalised



through Shakespeare's sophisticated subjectification of the duality of actor and role in *Macbeth*, a duality perceived in terms of conventional relations with the audience:

For the actor, the audience was a stimulating, challenging presence that could not be ignored, while for the character the audience was not present at all. These would seem to be mutually exclusive perspectives, yet Shakespeare combines them. For the character-as-actor the audience objectifies the possibility of self-presence. Macbeth does not speak to the audience but rather speaks of himself as though he were the audience; he assimilates its presence as an aspect of his own consciousness in order to become aware of himself as the actor of himself. (64)

The specific lines from *Macbeth* Van den Berg is referring to here—"Two truths are told, / As happy prologues to the swelling act / Of the imperial throne" (I.iii.127-9)—are part of an aside and are therefore akin to Shakespeare's longer "introspective soliloquies", such as the Bastard's first soliloquy in *King John* that begins "Well, now can I make any Joan a lady" (I.i.184), in which "[t]he character presents an image of himself onto the stage of his mind and then watches himself perform, often in an overtly or extravagantly theatrical way" (64).

### The Dynamics of Soliloquy

There is also a perceivable duality in the role of the audience, Van den Berg notes, evident in the contrast between soliloquy and the general dramatic convention "that the audience, from the character's point of view, is not there at all. As an invisible and invulnerable presence, the audience is the image and guarantor of the character's subjective existence" (65).<sup>12</sup> The convention of soliloquy, however, presents a paradox that transcends the practical necessity of the convention to effective stagecraft whereby the audience is permitted to witness a character's innermost thoughts. The audience, Van den Berg argues, provides a collusive society that endorses the "subversive meditations" of soliloquy: "[t]he private self requires a public; the distinction between private and public, or inner and outer, is attenuated in a community but emphasized in a society" (65). The convention of soliloquy is politically subversive because "[s]ubjective and private thoughts of whatever sort weaken community" (65). The distinction between society and community presented here is readily associated with the distinction between urban and rural existence discussed in the last chapter in the section on *theatrum mundi* and the metropolis. A parallel contrast could, of course, also be made between the medieval feudal community and the commercial, mercantile society of early modernity. While some dramatists (Webster, for example) continued to use it

<sup>12</sup> Tom Stoppard plays heavily on this concept in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. See particularly the Player's speech near the beginning of Act 2: "We're actors. . . . We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade; that someone would be watching. And then, gradually, no one was" (46).

primarily as a vehicle for the strategic revelation of what will occur, it is interesting to note that soliloquy developed into an exercise in self-discovery, a technique which has much in common, I suggest, with twentieth-century modes of acquiring self-knowledge through self-expression, such as the psychoanalytic “talking cure” and the self-consciously individualistic mores that shaped much of the century’s popular mass-culture. The voice-over narrative technique employed in classic Hollywood private detective movies, for example, expounds an ideology privileging a strong sense of pugnacious individuality. This characterised narrative would be quite superfluous to any practical function in relating plot development were it not for the fact that the audience is encouraged to believe that the narrator-hero (for the two are almost always identical) will ultimately prove to be master of his own destiny, outwitting and annihilating all external forces that oppose him. The private-public dynamics of soliloquy is also reciprocated in the experience of the individual audience member; Van den Berg cites Helene Keyssar, who asserts the proposition that the social value of theatre is that “[w]hen the world on the stage is maintained as separate from the world of the audience, we can be reminded fully of our separateness from the lives of others while simultaneously being confronted with the knowledge that we exist with others” (Keyssar 303; quoted in Van den Berg 66). Such a function, Van den Berg argues, would have been particularly valuable during the growth period of the incipient metropolis.

Wolfgang Clemen observes that Shakespeare’s soliloquies cannot be classified as expository, self-characterising, reflective, or homiletic in the manner of pre-Shakespearean drama, where the convention is used as an expedient device whereby characters may “introduce themselves, convey information, provide an exposition or reveal plans” (1987 179); rather they are “connected in different ways and at different levels with the dramatic organism as a whole” (1). Clemen reminds us that

Elizabethan drama was founded on the conjunction of the most diverse dramatic genres and styles. Mystery play and morality play, Senecan tragedy and euphuistic comedy, popular spectacle, pageant and masque—all these had given rise to a theatre which accommodated allegorical representation and realism, the use of rhetoric and colloquial speech. Dramatists employed the full range of so-called conventions in order to inform and instruct the spectators, to appeal to their power of imagination, but also to remind them of the fictionality of their theatrical experience, varying the manner of presentation from the most direct to the most indirect. (3)

Soliloquy in the Shakespearean sense reintroduces an association with meditative introspection and inner conflict, as connoted by Augustine’s original use of the term *soliloquium*. In pre-Shakespearean drama, Clemen observes, soliloquy was generally addressed directly to the audience, thus “forging a [reciprocal] link between them and the stage” (4). This method of direct address allows for a sense of audience

participation in the drama. Clemen believes, moreover, that this technique lends the speech a certain credibility or enhanced sense of “objective validity” (5) in the minds of the audience, who “are made to feel that they are being taken into the speaker’s confidence” (187). This rhetorical quality of soliloquy is open to subversion or abuse, and information imparted may later prove to be misleading or unreliable, constituting an element of “manipulation of audience response” (187). Thus, having accepted supposedly privileged information in good faith, we, the audience, may find by the end of the play that a character has been “giving us one-sided or even false information” (188), depending on how events pan out in relation to our expectations.

Clemen also observes in Shakespeare “the latent possibilities of dramatization within the soliloquy, of the process whereby monologue becomes dialogue, the speaker being split into selves which are in conflict with one another”. Such possibilities arise in conjunction with the observation that “several of Shakespeare’s characters are of an extrovert, histrionic disposition, and enjoy speaking of themselves as of another self” (6).<sup>13</sup> It is in this psychological respect in particular that Shakespeare’s soliloquies transcend the conventional uses of soliloquy as a dramaturgical device. Yet Clemen wants to be clear as to the precise nature and implications of the conventions that have been surpassed:

[Convention] means an agreement between an author and his public, an understanding that certain modes of presentation, intended to achieve certain effects, will be accepted. Convention can involve a process of simplification or abbreviation. It may enable the author to enrich the drama with perspectives and elements which could not have been included if adherence to the laws operating in real life had been demanded. Drama in itself, unfolding on the stage in front of us, presupposes our willingness to let ourselves be captivated by the fiction, and thus represents a convention. The bridging and the compression of time, the change of place, the disguises—these are only some of the dramatic conventions which we accept without hesitation. (7)

The above examples of time, place, and mask are considered “permanent” conventions, as opposed to “temporary” conventions “such as the use of verse, the personification of abstract qualities, or the inclusion of supernatural events and figures” (7). One such temporary convention that prevailed for many centuries was that according to which it was perfectly acceptable “that characters on the stage should think aloud and talk to themselves, while such behaviour was regarded as a pathological deviation from the norm in real life” (7).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, under the influence of naturalism, the convention of soliloquy became unfashionable. Yet even in Shakespeare, soliloquies are often set in ways that add to the “moment of solitude” a sense of

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<sup>13</sup> Act V of *Richard III* contains poignant examples of this phenomenon, with the extrovert collapsing into self-pity.

verisimilitude. One eminently plausible temporal setting is that of “the night-time, together with sleeplessness, brooding restlessness or tense anticipation of what is to come” (180). Certain spatial situations: “imprisonment, losing one’s way, concealment” are similarly likely preconditions for “the abandonment or isolation of a character” (180). Shakespearean soliloquy can also be seen, Clemen suggests, to connect through imagery the inner world of the character and the outer world of “everyday life and nature”; the language’s ability to appeal to our senses, to make us “hear, see and feel”, he describes in synaesthetic terms as a “psychophysical blend of the abstract and concrete” (181). In a temporal sense, soliloquy is similarly able to link past and future by being at once backward and forward-looking. On other occasions, it is as if time stands still, and the soliloquy is seen as a kind of caesura mediating the dramatic action that precedes and follows it. The additional effect of a slowing or halting of time can be achieved when soliloquy is used to punctuate moments of suspense or anticipation.

Despite their acknowledgement of such considerations as convention and technique outlined above, the greatest of Shakespeare’s soliloquies, Clemen argues, remain by-and-large self-justifying; audiences or readers “will sense that here something is finding expression which at this point in time seems so necessary and so convincing that no further justification is needed” (9). This is so, Clemen maintains, in contrast with the tendency that “in seeing one character in conversation with another, we only gain a partial and inadequate knowledge of each; we long to know the real person hidden behind this shell” (9).

The various stylistic devices to which Clemen attributes Shakespeare’s achievement of dramatising “dialogue within the monologue” centre around the notion of “the *partner* in the internal dialogue” (11, my emphasis). This notion is explicated as follows:

In pre-Shakespearean drama, as also in the plays of classical antiquity, in Seneca and in the medieval mystery plays, it had already become apparent that an imaginary partner was required for the soliloquy to come alive. Various forms of address, apostrophe and the use of fictitious dialogue within the soliloquy may be observed. Shakespeare took the development of dialogue within the monologue much further; and those who followed after him could not extend the multiplicity of partner situations that he devised. The speaker may address his ego, his own heart, or heavenly and earthly powers, or people absent, or sometimes even present (but out of earshot); or he may address personifications, sun, moon and stars, real or imaginary objects (such as the dagger in *Macbeth*). The dialogue within the monologue is sustained by the interplay of questions and answers. A particular kind of dramatic effect arises when the soliloquy represents a process of transformation, of reversal, when the to and fro of question and answer results in a final attitude quite different from that prevailing at the beginning of the speech. Within the confines of such soliloquies a self-contained drama is played out. Shakespeare recognized more clearly than his contemporaries, and more clearly than most of his successors, that man is a paradoxical creature; this is apparent in many of the soliloquies. (182)

The “varying transitions and startling contrasts of mood” arising in soliloquy are often, Clemen notes, “suggested by the rhythm of the language as well as the meaning of the words” (183). This is an important observation because it shows how Shakespeare’s soliloquies were written “with an eye to their performance” (183) and how the consummate dramatist was able to use extra-linguistic, pragmatic elements not only to portray changes in mood but often as implicit intra-textual stage directions, replacing “elucidation” with “half-tacit suggestion” (185).

Clemen’s observations regarding the evolution of soliloquy into a medium for self-discovery, even self-fashioning, carry over, I suggest, into the study of lyric poetry and seem particularly applicable to some of Donne’s poems that lack a direct addressee. I shall discuss a number of such poems—“This is my playes last scene”, “I am a little world made cunningly”, Twickenham garden”, and “A nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day”—in Chapter Eight. Each of these has soliloquy-like features which achieve more with regard to psychological character development than mere scene-setting or the expedient divulgence of information.

### ***Theatrum Mundi* and Phenomenological Scepticism**

Howard D. Pearce’s essay “A Phenomenological Approach to the *Theatrum Mundi* Metaphor” (1980) attempts to identify “pertinent characteristics” of the metaphor that are available diachronically, from Plato’s allegory of the cave to elements of modern dramatic realism. The study’s principle focus for textual analysis is David Storey’s play *The Contractor*, but reference is also made to Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, Calderón’s *Life is a Dream*, Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*, Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, and Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Pearce observes that as well as the stage the topos involves other secondary metaphors of phenomenological unreliability or indeterminacy, including dreams, inebriation, insanity, and wandering. Each of these functions as an analogue of the stage and, in Platonic terms, represents a “pale” imitation of its allegedly reliable counterpart: real life and its respective analogues, such states as being awake, sober, and mentally stable. Pearce’s study is particularly concerned with what he considers a “traditional close association between the metaphors of stage and dream” (42). He notes that in English drama of the early seventeenth century the *theatrum mundi* topos functioned as a provocative vehicle for the epistemological and ontological questions pertinent to a period of “intellectual and political turmoil, skepticism, and factionalism” (42), adding that it had a similar utilitarian appeal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But even in times of greater stability, Pearce claims, “the reminder that life is but a dream might have cemented a belief in the Christian heaven or confirmed hopes for the Platonic ideal” (42).

Pearce's conceptual model for reality beyond the stage or dream is formulated around his interpretation of Martin Heidegger's conception of "Being", in which "the examination of being, language, and relationships is clearly the pursuit of the comprehensible and the explicable" (42). He also uses Heidegger's distinction between "earth" and "world", which formulates the latter as "man on the earth, experiencing and interpreting, structuring, apprehending through his capacity for drawing relationships" (43). In other words, "world" should be perceived as an abstract anthropomorphic construct that really means, once explicated, "relationship between mind and world" (43) of any given individual that is regulated by underlying structures that Heidegger called "dimensions":

As dimensionality, Being comprises the possible relationships suggested by such opposite pairs as inner and outer, subject and object, before and after, near and far, superior and inferior. Dimensionalizing becomes the stratification Plato [in the *Phaedo*] likes to think in terms of, circles within circles, layer on layer. Swift's fleas are dimensionalized, having smaller fleas to prey on them: "And these have smaller Fleas to bite 'em / And so proceed *ad infinitum*". (43)

Pearce identifies "two primary aspects" of *theatrum mundi*: the ontological and epistemological. The "ontological pole of the theater-dream topos" gains its dimensional aspect as follows:

The audience comes in from its own world, its "real" world of business and negotiation. In the theater it has moved into a world of leisure, *otium*. That world looks in, in turn, on the affairs of the stage world—for instance, the Athens of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (1600). That world—transformed into, or displaced by, the dreamworld of the wood—produces yet another world, the intruding world of the mechanicals who, producing yet another world, the play of Pyramus and Thisbe, find an audience, "an actor too perhaps," in Puck (III.i.79). Again hierarchical or concentric relationships pertain. (44)

This is not to say that the relations pertaining between these worlds provide a metaphoric vehicle that implies a straightforward bivalent polarity between reality and fantasy, thus privileging and reinforcing confidence in that particular world which is conventionally deemed real. The tension between these worlds is not affirming but subversive and levelling:

These analogous transformations do not, however, confirm the distinction between the real and the fictional. On the contrary, they point up the leveling effect of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor. The privileged reality that we accept as certain, substantial, and enduring is converted by the protracted metaphorical relations. In calling into question that base of certain reality, the metaphor reduces the distinction between the real and the fictional and raises the ontological question. (44)

Like Van den Berg, Pearce is interested in the dialectic relations pertaining between the concentrically ordered worlds that arise from the notion of the world-stage metaphor and the phenomenon of the play-within-a-play. Pearce places slightly more emphasis, however, on the idea that “the world and the stage are structured as dimensions, but dimensions intricately involved rather than opposed” (49). As with Donne’s use of *theatrum mundi* in the sermon on I Corinthians 13:12, so optical imagery features in Pearce’s analysis when he considers the reflective quality of such relations as exemplified by Jonson:

The ontological question is asked in terms of one dimension of reality reflecting another. In Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), the Londoners who go to the fair bring with them values that are exposed, penetrated, reflected, and transformed by those of the fair. The fair is a world within a world that vibrates when the two worlds touch. Within the fair is another such world, the puppet show, standing ready to multiply relations between the reflective dimensions of reality. (44)

The image of the puppet show, often presented in the form of shadows projected from behind onto a translucent screen (although, admittedly, not so in *Bartholomew Fair*) is suggestive of a phenomenological scepticism that harks back to the allegory of the cave, and Pearce points out that “[b]oth the *theatrum mundi* topos and Plato’s schema involve directionality, movement from one level to another—in and out, up and down” (45).

The epistemological aspect of the topos is evident in Pearce’s assertion, “[t]he idea of dream, as opposed to that of theater, implies an experiencing subject as center” (45). The difference between theatre and dream is akin to a novel using a first person narrative point-of-view (dream) and one using the third person (theatre). It can be inferred from this that the dream, or first person point-of-view, is more in keeping with the dynamics of lyric poetry in which it is certainly a common enough motif. The presence of the theatre metaphor, whether explicit or implicit, in lyric poetry therefore suggests a departure from generic convention that problematises the subjective status of the poem, and I suggest this effect is achieved occasionally in Donne through the use of spatial imagery, and specifically the creation of lit interiors. Pearce, however, utilises a Husserlian concept of experience as a holistic event that confounds the objective and subjective polarity:

Again the traditional metaphor opens up the problem of knowing the world and oneself in it, the problem central to phenomenological thought. Husserl’s idea of “intentionality” is an attempt to clarify the relationship between knower and known, subject and object. “Intentionality” suggests that experience and the object of experience are inextricably bound together, all experience being experience of something. The problem of locating reality in subject or in object, the old realist-idealist split, is no genuine problem if experience is intentional—if it always blends with the thing experienced. (46)

Focusing on the epistemological problem inherent in the dream metaphor Pearce writes: “[i]f we begin with the premise that life is a dream, then short of waking from the dream there is no certain means of escaping to some island of mind standing dry above the sea of appearances” (46). Such are the dynamics of Calderón’s play *Life is a Dream* (1635) which, for Pearce, “opens with a descent into the darkness of the Platonic cave” (46). The cave is presented in the form of the prison from which the prisoner, Segismund, “awakens” to find himself a prince attending a court entertainment, only to reawaken, through a drugged sleep, back in prison. The transformations are part of a test carried out by Segismund’s father, Basil, and the outcome is an ironic undermining of the concepts of both world and ego. Donne, of course, makes dramatic use of the prince/prisoner dichotomy in the famous line from “The Extasie”: “Else a great Prince in prison lies” (68).

Pearce’s phenomenological view of *theatrum mundi* is also dependent upon the notion of “the audience as a dimension in the theatre-dream metaphor”, qualified by the assertion that “[p]rologue, epilogue, aside, and soliloquy in Renaissance drama attest to the audience’s appreciative complicity” (50). Whereas Van den Berg uses the term “replication”, Pearce notes that “the principle of *repetition* requires that the audience be considered part of the total context of the play” (50, my emphasis). And once again, as with Donne’s use of *theatrum mundi* in the sermon on I Corinthians 13:12, reflective, optical imagery is utilised, this time as a feature of the relations proposed: “The play as imaginative event not only constitutes a structure in itself but sets up a reflective relationship with the audience, who as interpreters become yet another structuring agent, one that attempts to repeat the objective structures” (50). Pearce refers to Jean-Paul Sartre, who in his essay “Beyond Bourgeois Theatre” is similarly interested in the phenomenological aspect of the stage-world metaphor as an analogue for experiential subject-object relations:

He [Sartre] argues that the bourgeois audience-subjects see merely reflections of themselves on the stage. The bourgeois theatre panders to the subjectivity of the audience. In contrast, the stage in Brecht’s theater of alienation is so objectified that it becomes utterly alien, other than self. What Sartre wants is a phenomenological (or existential) theater that presents a quasi-objectivity. Paradoxically, such a theater directs itself inward to the observer’s subjective being and at the same time draws the observer outward toward genuine experience of the nonself. (50)

The final aspect of Pearce’s essay I want to discuss is the idea that “multiple worlds—stages within stages” lend themselves to the “reflected” presence of the artist. Such a hypothesis is predicated upon Pearce’s assertion that “I have all along considered the playwright a dimension of his play” (53). This observation, however, requires certain qualification:



But I do not mean “playwright” in the sense we generally intend. This playwright is not to be defined by a mechanist-historical model; rather, he appears as a dimension of the play—not necessarily, and not at first thematically, but potentially. The artist I refer to comes into play through my participation in the “hermeneutic circle”: I move from the expectation of finding him to evidence of his presence in the play and back to the totality I name “the artist,” thematically a type. He . . . is at most a question in the play, part of the reality to be discovered. . . . When I stand open to him in the play, I discover him as artist in the event, not a dramatized persona (though he may be that too) but a subjectivity controlling an objectivity that he himself has produced, the formal aspects of language, character, thought, and action. I discover how he “brings it off,” how he is essentially reflected in the work. (53-4)

Pearce’s theory concerning the presence (or meta-presence) of the inferred playwright is similar to the concept in criticism of both lyric and narrative poetry or fiction of “voice” in the sense of “a person behind behind all the *dramatis personae*, including even the first person narrator”(Abrams 136-7). On the other hand, it also conflicts with the concepts of “negative capability” (a term coined by Keats) or “aesthetic distance”, referring to an objective, impersonal authorial stance whereby the author does not enter his or her work either as a character or characterised narrator. These terms also connote an absence of polemical or rhetorical motive on the part of the author to impart a belief system to the reader (see Abrams 112-13). According to the principles of negative capability and aesthetic distance, the kind of authorial presence that Pearce’s phenomenological theory identifies as an element of dramatic writing in no way conflicts with rhetorical elements. There is, however, a potential paradox raised by the concept of an author-function created in part by the reader and, contrastingly, the degree of control attributed to the artist by Pearce.

### Metadrama and Speech Acts

As Heather Dubrow observes in her essay “Twentieth-Century Shakespeare Criticism” (prefixed to the Second Edition of *The Riverside Shakespeare*), the 1970s and early 1980s saw a flourish of structuralist and deconstructionist approaches to Shakespeare’s texts that were principally concerned with language and textuality. In particular, the term “metatheatre” (I have been referring to the same principle as “metadrama”) is defined as “the study of how drama comments on itself, especially on its own theatricality” and, as Dubrow notes, “[it] is not a new approach, but it enjoyed a resurgence of interest in that period” (41). This section introduces concepts emanating from speech act theory to the principles of metadrama outlined in this chapter. First, I shall briefly discuss the outcome of such an approach applied to a group of four plays by Shakespeare in two studies mentioned by Dubrow, who adds that “[w]hen applied to literary criticism, speech act analysis can investigate questions such as why a particular character is repeatedly attracted to a certain type of speech act or how and why

a direct speech act may conceal an indirect one; thus it is particularly well suited to the analysis of drama" (41).

James L. Calderwood's *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad* (1979) treats four of the history plays—*Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts One and Two*, and *Henry V*—as a tetralogy that functions as a self-contained and self-reflexive complex metaphor "in which the playwright subjects the nature and materials of his art to radical scrutiny" (1). Calderwood covers aspects of metadrama similar to those that I have already outlined such as dramatic illusion (phenomenology), dramatic form (withdrawal and return), and theatrical mimesis (replication). In addition to these concerns, he is interested in a thematic development within "the main metadramatic plot" of the *Henriad*, which involves what he calls the "fall and partial recovery of speech" (7). The perception of such a fall is predicated upon the notion of the Divine Rightness of kingship which "corresponds [to] a kind of language in which words have an inalienable right to their meanings, even a divine right insofar as God is the ultimate guarantor of verbal truth. . . an invisible third partner to every dialogue" (5). According to Calderwood, such a magical, sacramental language collapses in *Richard II* through Bolingbroke's "usurpation of the name 'king' [which] brings into dramatic being both the lie and the metaphor" (6) thus instilling in the two *Henry IV* plays a corrupt, pragmatic, secular language which nonetheless signposts a "redemption of the word [that] is figured in commercial terms as the paying of verbal debts, by Hal, 'who never promiseth but he means to pay' (V.4.43), and by Shakespeare, whose successful dramatic form depends on his fulfilment of structural promises" (7). Such a redemption is realised in the rhetorical language of *Henry V* where "words take on an achieved, pragmatic value as instruments of persuasive action, even as English kingship takes on an earned, human value by virtue of Harry's victory at Agincourt" (7).

Calderwood notes how, through metadramatic subplots incorporating metaphoric admissions of the fact that theatre is essentially a lie, Shakespeare avoids both dishonesty and authorial chauvinism and "wrests a new kind of [dramatic] order in which the playwright adopts the paradoxical role of impartial partisan" (8). He also emphasises as a parallel between the fall and partial redemption, a "'subsistent' shift in the nature of symbolism" that occurred in Shakespeare's time (made "insistent" by Shakespeare's self-reflexive metadramatisation). Also cited is Ernst Cassirer's division of verbal history into three phases—mimetic, analogical, symbolic—which Calderwood summarises as follows:

In the mimetic phase, primitive speech reflects—by onomatopoeia an similar means—the sensory impression of objects so that the word as nearly as possible is the thing. In the analogical phase, words become detached from their referents, no longer directly resembling them, but associated by parallelism and correlation. Finally, in the symbolic phase, words are signs wholly unrelated to the meanings arbitrarily assigned to them. (Calderwood 1979 8-9; see also Cassirer 186-98)

In an appendix entitled “Elizabethan naming”, Calderwood links this passage with allegorical Christian ideas about language that prevailed in the collective consciousness of the era. He observes that Elizabethans “felt that words were in close covenant with the world. . . . that human speech is, at least vestigally, a divine institution” (184-5). While God literally “*spoke* the world into being” (185), Adam was believed to have used a spontaneous, natural language—the *lingua Adamica* or *lingua humana*—to give the various creatures in Paradise their “true names. . . . [which] corresponded exactly to the objects they represented” (188). Through Edenic speech, then, humankind and nature were bound together in one community. Even after the Fall humans were at least bound together by a common language until God divided this into a thousand tongues as a punishment, or “second curse”, in response to “unwise aspiration symbolized [in the legend of Babel] by the raising of a tower and the forging of a name (Genesis, 11:4)” (189). Babel thus marks the fall of prehistoric Edenic speech, of the linguo-mythic unity of word and thing, in which the act of naming had “liberated man from the bondage of time and vaulted him eventually into the domain of thought” (191). Adam’s liberation through nominative utterance “in which words partake in things” (191) is followed by the realisation of “the discreteness of words and things . . . [and] that in what he had thought to be his dialogue with nature he was merely talking to himself” (192). Calderwood notes that, to the Elizabethan mind, such an unhappy estrangement from nature (through the creation of subject and object) would have been inextricably linked to the biblical Fall. In contrast, to the modern mind, Calderwood suggests, “the breakdown of word and thing becomes the liberation of the word from the thing” (192-3).

Joseph A. Porter’s *The Drama of Speech Acts* (1979) is also concerned with the subject of speech and language in Shakespeare’s Lancastrian tetralogy, or “Henriad”. Like Calderwood, Porter considers the biblical Fall and the story of Babel to be analogues or “summary metaphors” that provide a frame of reference for the ways in which language is conceived and used in the tetralogy, together with a third metaphor concerned with kingship and social order, borrowed from E.M.W. Tillyard, who proposes that the tetralogy is an emblematic enactment of a historical shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance (3-4). In addition to the “expository convenience” provided by these summary metaphors, Porter’s methodology employs what he terms “conceptual machinery” modified from the principles of Austinian and Searlean speech act theory.

Porter uses the theory of speech acts in what he considers the unconventional and dramaturgic (as opposed to the thematic) aspect of his study, “the part that takes speech action as the object of attention” (153). The concept of speech as action initiated by Austin in the 1950s is itself unconventional, Porter suggests, because according to

the principles of the theory “action” may be verbal or non-verbal, speech therefore forming a subset of all actions. This opposes the more conventional view that conceives of action as non-verbal by definition, even to the point of creating a polarity when contrasted with speech (154). Such a polarity in dramatic criticism, therefore, makes it unconventional to perceive speech as action; nonetheless, this is exactly what speech act theory does, with its preoccupation with explicit and implicit performative utterances—words that are also correctly to be considered deeds, such as promising, warning, commanding, naming, or swearing allegiance. Porter believes that performatives offer a way of analysing dramatic action that neither relies upon stage directions nor upon implicature and explicature of utterances within the text. A distinction, moreover, is proposed between the dynamics of “speech action” in dramatic and non-dramatic genres:

In a sense any nondramatic work constitutes a single monolithic speech act, having, in the first place, one speaker (the narrator, expositor, “poet,” or whatever) and one direction of address. Furthermore with nondramatic works we can often name a single illocutionary force for the entire work—such as the force of narration. None of this holds for drama. There is no way to describe an entire drama as a single speech act; there is no single speaker who is the doer of the action. But this is to say that speech action, and features of speech action, are at issue in drama, at issue because variable and indeterminate. Indeed one might suggest a version of Aristotle’s formula based on Austin: “speech action is the soul of verbal drama.” (161)

Richard Ohmann makes a similar point to Porter’s when he writes that “in a play, the action rides on a train of illocutions” (1973 83), although Ohmann is not suggesting that this cannot hold for non-dramatic writing, merely that drama is the example *par excellence* of literary speech action. Porter suggests that it is story or plot that distinguishes drama from lyric (164). He also excludes what he refers to as “meditative lyrics” from the category of “verbal drama”, yet he does not allow for the “dramatic lyric”, or “I-thou” poem, of which many of Donne’s most memorable poems are examples. Several of these poems, I suggest, pose as “monolithic” or “global speech acts” and in so doing belie far more interactive dynamics than “one direction of address” allows for. Porter’s theory overlooks the aspect of illocutionary acts that Austin calls “audience uptake”, by which speech acts commonly call for a participatory role on the part of the addressee. In identifying the sub-genre of dramatic lyric, one is able to observe a lyric form with a sense of dramatic situation akin to a story line. If lyric poetry is able to subsume dramatic elements in such a way, it should not be assumed, as Porter appears to be doing, that the two modes—dramatic and lyrical—are mutually exclusive.

Porter’s theoretical machinery incorporating speech acts as an aspect of metadrama is nonetheless a useful tool “to get at what is distinctive and thus

characteristic in the verbal action of dramatic characters”, thereby providing character profiles that “are not especially naturalistic or psychological” (163) but based rather on a proclivity for certain classes of performative. Porter takes this notion as far as to propose that “there is no such thing as a Shakespearean or Marlovian [dramatic] style, but only Falstaffian, Hotspurian, Tamburlainian styles” (163), and is subsequently able to draw a useful distinction between “drama” and “theatre”. According to such a distinction drama is perceived as “a verbal entity embodied in performance” (164), and the term describes a literary genre distinct from other genres. “Theatre”, on the other hand, does not describe a literary genre but a set of social and commercial conventions that have typically come to involve a literary entity as a performance text or basis for performance-as-text.

Porter sees as an essential feature of drama as a literary genre the fact that the dramatic utterance is not narrated by a “teller”<sup>14</sup> and that (as opposed to, say, the lyric utterance) “drama lacks a (single) sayer of it” and that the text is “assign[ed] to a group of speakers”; subsequently, Porter argues,

[t]he “locutionary acts”—the acts of saying such-and-such a thing—are thus perfectly and completely represented by the text. “Illocutionary acts” may be completely and perfectly represented; this occurs when they are made explicit—as by a performative, or conceivably by a stage direction. Otherwise they are implied by the text; and the same is true of nonverbal action which is not indicated by stage directions. (165-6).

Although Porter’s study is concerned only with the four plays of the Lancastrian tetralogy, he nevertheless provides some clues as to how his method could be applied to non-dramatic verse. He is careful, for example, not to privilege the plays’ purported metadramatic theme to the point of losing sight of their actual (dramatic) theme, kingship:

To see the tetralogy as being about drama does not mean taking the work as an allegorized poetics any more than to see it about kingship means taking it as an allegorized political tract; nor is it to suppose that dramatic art is what the tetralogy is “really,” at base, essentially, about. Nor on the other hand does it necessitate timidly restricting oneself to commentary on passages in which the subject of drama is handled explicitly—theatrical performances within the plays, appearances of the theater metaphor, or words like “actor,” “play,” and the like—any more than considering the theme of kingship would necessitate limiting attention to the analogous passages. (167-8)

Porter also acknowledges that as a concept the “metadramatic dimension” by which a play “is its own subject” is, to say the least, “potentially bewildering”: there is a difference, for example, between saying that “the play is about the dramatic art of which

<sup>14</sup> See Booth’s definitions of dramatic approaches to narrative in prose fiction quoted in the introduction to Part II, pp. 47-8.

it is an example” and “the play is about itself as an instance of dramatic art” (168). Ultimately, what Porter attempts to demonstrate is “not that the tetralogy in every respect is about the genre of drama, but merely that the tetralogy, in being about language and speech action . . . is (also) about drama” (169). One could also add, with similar circularity, that the plays’ dramatic theme of kingship is similarly caught up in central concerns of speech action, especially with regard to Austin’s Rule A. 2 for the felicitous performance of speech acts: “the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked” (Austin 1962 14).

Despite the presence of metadramatic elements in the four plays, it is Porter’s view that the Lancastrian tetralogy “is not in any important sense about drama, since the subject is mentioned only in a handful of passages” (169). This observation is supported by Calderwood, who argues that the point of a metadramatic criticism “is simply to provide a way of looking at Shakespearean drama that perhaps brings into relief a territory of meaning which Shakespeare could hardly have ignored and which we as critics might well explore” (Calderwood 1971 20; quoted in Porter 169). Porter adds the observation that “[i]n writing brief lyrics and long narratives side by side with plays he [Shakespeare] would presumably have been thinking about the less obvious differences between these genres” (169). This notion in itself, I suggest, provides a key justification for the application of metadramatic, speech action oriented criticism to the non-dramatic works not only of Shakespeare but also of his contemporaries: “[s]uch a preoccupation with the nature of drama, implied by the variety of genres undertaken in the period, would, one assumes, be manifested *within* the works themselves. I suspect that one could discover numerous such manifestations—various, interesting, and subtle ones” (170). Porter adds that the play-within-a-play is a “particularly striking example” (170) of manifestations arising from such a metadramatic preoccupation. Yet it is in a temporal theme that he finds an affinity between the tetralogy and the “‘metapoetic’ parts of Shakespeare’s sonnets—those places in which the sonnets are most explicitly about themselves” (184). The eternising conceit found in sonnets addressed to the young gentleman near the beginning of the cycle guarantees that “the genre itself is a refuge against the ravages of time” (184). Porter notes vague similarities between these sonnets and the style of language in *Richard II*, and in the two *Henry IV* plays he also perceives “something like a bemused wondering about the [dramatic] genre, and about the apparent incomprehensibility of allegiance to a form which, incidentally because it is theatrical and essentially because it consists of a story without a teller, seems sworn brother to cormorant and devouring time” (185).

### Speech Acts in Drama and Donne's "Masculine Persuasive (Illocutionary) Force"

Stanley Fish's essay "How to Do Things with Austin and Searle" (1980), incorporates a speech act theory reading of *Coriolanus*. Fish attempts to demonstrate, however, that analyses of performative utterances in literary works are not particularly illuminating and that *Coriolanus* is a special case because it is what he calls a "speech act play", insofar as its dramatic action emanates from the protagonist's haughty resistance to the constraints of social convention upon which speech acts are based when he refuses to formally request the votes of his fellow Roman citizens in his bid to become consul.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of whether we accept that *Coriolanus* is a speech act play in the sense proposed by Fish or in a more general sense, it is significant that the play is practically devoid of soliloquy and its attendant proclivity for self-revelation and self-discovery. It should also be noted that Fish's antagonistic approach to proposed performative readings of works of literature in this essay has by-and-large been discredited or ignored and that in subsequent work by Fish himself the former hard-line stance is modified, bearing witness to the validity of a more general or centrist application of speech act theory to literary studies. This chapter will therefore conclude with a discussion of one such article by Fish that demonstrates the application of metadramatic principles to Donne's lyric poetry.

Fish attempts to undermine authorial agency completely in an essay entitled "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power" (1990; 1999), which, although somewhat far-fetched, serves to emphasise the fact that it is possible to discern dramatic elements in Donne that are not reliant on the kind of psychological or partisan readings adhered to by earlier critics who aimed to make the poet into a cult hero. Fish's observations are pertinent to this study, in which, having surveyed a broad cross-section of literature by critics who have inferred that Donne is dramatic in some particular way, I concluded that the use of the term proves too varied and often too vague to construct any kind of holistic or overarching meta-critical theory.

Fish attempts to define metadramatic dimensions involving speech acts in Donne's work that purportedly have the effect of erasing the poet and his speakers from the equation altogether. In so doing, he attributes all agency to the utterance itself, which is, in turn, reliant upon a reader (actual, intended, or implied) to process, interpret, indeed, to re-enact. Fish begins the essay by describing Donne as "bulimic", then proceeds to argue that the dramatic and performative aspects of Donne's poetry undermine the various identities that other readings have applied to the poem's speakers. The central premise of Fish's essay is that Donne is obsessed with "the

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<sup>15</sup> Coriolanus's silence is therefore relevant to the speech action in a similar way to that ascribed by Potter to Bolingbroke in *Richard II*; see Porter 176-8.

power words can exert” and that the poems themselves not only exercise this power but that “they report on its exercise and stage it again in the reporting” (157). Focusing initially on some of the *Elegies* (“The Anagram”, “The Comparison”), Fish observes that, within the contexts of the worlds that the poet creates in the poems, Donne performs acts of manipulation on the inhabitants of those worlds and in doing so “provides a theatrical explanation of his performances” (158). “The Comparison”, for example, is described as “an amazing performance, a high-wire act complete with twists, flips, double reverses, and above all, triumphs” (159).

Fish claims that the poems are masculinely gendered insofar as they are acts of “self-dramatisation of an independent authority [which] can be sustained only if the speaker is himself untouched by the force he exerts on others” (161). The typical relation, then, is that the speaker in the poems is the origin and not the object of his performance, a trend that, according to Fish, Donne reverses at times, specifically in some of the *Holy Sonnets* (162). For the most part, though, he believes that the poems present “[t]he continual reproduction of a self that can never be the same, that can never be ‘its own’ [and] is at once reported and repeatedly performed” (162). Using *Elegy 16* [“On His Mistress”] as a prime example of this self-referential, autonomous yet alienated poetics, Fish notes:

the principal actors in that world are not the speaker or his mistress or her father, but the various speech acts in relation to which they have roles to play and meanings to declare. A phrase like ‘fathers wrath’ names a conventional linguistic practice, not a person, and when the speaker swears by it, indeed *conjures* by it, he acknowledges the extent to which the energy he displays is borrowed from a storehouse of verbal formulas that belong to no one and precede everyone. (163, Fish’s emphasis)

The real drama staged in this poem, moreover, is “a struggle between its own medium and the first person voice that presumes to control it” (164). Fish astutely notes that the “masculine persuasive force” that the speaker would like to claim as his own comprises “mutually defining and redundant” terms that are attributed not to the speaker himself but to his “words” (163).

Proceeding to the *Satires*, Fish argues that the speaker’s precarious relationship with the worlds he creates only to scorn shows that, like the narcissist, he “refuses to recognise himself in the indictment he makes for others” (167). Often, then, the speaker is but a “mirror of everything around him, an indiscriminate mixture” (168) as is the case in *Satire II*, and that which he mirrors and of which he himself is constituted is the power of signs, the forces that activate “his production of words, his *show*” (169, Fish’s emphasis). In the *Holy Sonnets*, Fish claims, Donne’s speaker actually submits to the masculine persuasive force that he attempts to exert elsewhere, thus appearing willing to make himself the object of that force. “Batter my heart, three person’d God”,



for example, shows that “this rearrangement of roles only emphasises the durability of the basic Donnean situation and gives it an odd and unpleasant twist in the poem’s closing couplet” (170). In the *Holy Sonnets* as a whole, moreover, Fish again observes a preoccupation with the notion that the exertion of signifying power can have the effect of problematising the ontological status of the speaker:

As in the elegies and the satires, the relentless assertion and demonstration of the power of signs to bring their own referents into being – to counterfeit love and grief and piety – undermines the implicit claim of *this* producer of signs to be real, to be anything more than an effect of the resources he purports to control. (173, Fish’s emphasis)

As a case in point of this deconstructive effect, Fish cites “What if this present were the worlds last night?”, comparing the poem’s dramatic qualities, starting with its opening line, with aspects of Donne’s sermons:

it is obviously theatrical and invites us to imagine (or to be) an audience before whom this proposition will be elaborated in the service of some homiletic point. But in the second line [‘Mark in my heart, O soul, where thou dost dwell’] everything changes abruptly. The theatricalism is continued, but the stage has shrunk from one on which Donne speaks to many of a (literally) cosmic question to a wholly interior setting populated only by versions of Donne. (174)

The notion that Donne “occupies every role on his poem’s stage” ultimately only serves, Fish argues, as an indication of that space’s insulation “from any corrective reference other than the one it allows” (174). He maintains, moreover, that this solipsistic dynamic ultimately renders Donne’s poetry insubstantial, finding further evidence for this view in the triumphantly rhetorical flourishes with which each of the *Songs and Sonets* concludes. These turns of wit, he claims, illustrate an arbitrary move to a cadence that undermines the poems’ other effects, such as the presence of a subject beyond the speaking subject: “The better he is at what he does with words, the less able he is to claim (or believe) that behind the words—o’erstriding the abyss—stands a self-possessed being” (176). This instability of the subject and the fact that the poems are unable to present in words “inward experience” or “real self”, Fish suggests, derives from the insight that “the problem with language in these poems is not that it is too weak to do something, but that it is so strong that it does everything, exercising its power to such an extent that nothing, including the agent of that exercise, is left outside its sphere” (178). In other words, the poems are self-referential in that the identity of the speaker of the poem-as-utterance remains engulfed within and defined by the autonomous system that the poem has become. In terms of Richard Halpern’s theory of “autopoiesis” in Donne, it could be added that the poetry, as a literary example of the differentiation of social systems, has reached the point of solipsistic opacity towards

which all such differentiated systems are orientated as they inevitably increase in complexity (see Halpern 104 *passim*).

Fish uses his insights regarding the problematic of the masculine persuasive force of Donne's words for the ontology of the subject to challenge what he terms a "series of [twentieth-century] critical romances" with Donne as a poet "in possession of his poetry and therefore of himself": from Eliot's observation of "unified sensibility" to the New Critics' discernment of a "range of psychological experience . . . [and] succession of flawed speakers", and finally to the sceptical "existential hero" that postmodernism attempts to identify behind his words (179). This final challenge by Fish signals, perhaps, postmodernism's failure to completely extract itself from what could be called the "romance of presence": to devise a subjective presence to render a poetic utterance from a distant time germane to current thinking is surely an indication that subjectivity is inferentially imposed upon the utterance, not in any way essential to it but rather an instrumental label that flatters readers by endorsing their own preferred brand of hermeneutics. Ultimately, Fish's critique calls into question the position of the subject with regard not only to seventeenth-century poetry but also within any conventional or institutional discourse, any self-defining and self-enacting speech event. The central premise of his argument, moreover, is that an utterance's verbal force can problematise or deconstruct the agency of the putative subject or speaker as the origin of the utterance. In my view, Fish's version of speech act theory is too radical not to become reductive and his approach will not inform my readings of Donne's poetry to any significant degree. I cannot concur with an ontology which claims that signs bring their own referents into being. Neither do I find the assertion that the speaker is not present behind the poem particularly illuminating; in terms of real versus possible worlds this is surely true of all literary personae. For even a third person narrator, who seems to bridge the literary and real worlds by directly addressing his reader, is a fictive construct whose "presence" must be inferred by the reader. The value of including a discussion of Fish's work here is basically that it applies some of the principles of metadrama, particularly those presented by Calderwood and Porter, to Donne's lyric poetry.

To summarise, in this part of the thesis I have looked in some depth at various aspects of both the *theatrum mundi* topos and the concept of metadrama, the latter being essentially an offshoot of the former. I have done so because these are both factors emanating from drama that one can reasonably assume were part of the collective literate psyche at the time Donne was writing. It is therefore likely that, given such a context, the poet would be confident that oblique or implicit allusion to these concepts and any ramifications thereof would be readily picked up by his contemporary readership. The general headings under which I have discussed *theatrum mundi* are the literary tradition of the world-stage metaphor; *theatrum humanae vitae* and the temporal dimensions of *theatrum mundi*; and the spatial dimensions of *theatrum mundi*, including the poetics of

theatrical space, playhouse architecture and cosmic iconography. The principles of metadrama covered include replication; withdrawal and return, the central figure of the actor, identity, difference, and equivalence in mimesis; internalising the actor/role duality; the dynamics of soliloquy; phenomenological scepticism; and speech acts and verbal force. In the chapter that follows many of these concepts will be revisited in the context of a series of close readings of Donne poems.

### PART III: DRAMATIC ECONOMY IN DONNE'S LYRIC POETRY

#### Introduction

What can members of a theatre audience realistically expect to know about the characters in a play? Only that, surely, which is divulged, explicitly or otherwise, in the script or dialogue performed on stage. This is as true for dramatic verse as it is for verse drama. With dramatic verse, moreover, it is almost always the case that only one character has a "script", as convention dictates that lyric poetry has only one speaker and is in textual terms, to borrow Donne's own phrase, a "dialogue of one". In this sense any dramatic lyric or monologue is metadramatic insofar as the speaker's speech functions to enact or establish speaker identity and other information that assists reader interpretation. For this reason readers are often tempted, often unwisely no doubt, to identify the speaker with the poet. Such a temptation has its parallel, of course, in prose fiction when readers find themselves identifying the narrator with the novelist. As far as Donne is concerned, such a tendency towards autobiographical interpretation is especially prevalent with regard to the rakish, dissolute personae of what are generally considered to be examples of his earlier work, the *Elegies*, *Satires*, and a number of the *Songs and Sonets*.

Asking ourselves questions about what we as readers can reasonably infer about the speaker leads naturally to the consideration of further implicature regarding other characters both on and off stage. Of particular interest is the presence and identity of an addressee, where there is one, and the point of disclosure within the poem when the reader is first aware of that addressee. Drawing upon a set of reasonable inferences about the *dramatis personae*, beginning with the speaker, then the addressee, then any other parties implicated, the reader can begin to piece together the entire dramatic scene (a dramatic lyric is more akin to a scene or *vignette* than an entire play due largely to its brevity and subsequent limitations regarding plot and character development). Inferences regarding the secondary and tertiary characters also assist in fleshing out the reader's mental picture of the speaker or protagonist. The remaining dimension to be considered is the position of the reader with respect to both physical location and participation in the dramatic action. The process I have just outlined forms the general *modus operandi* for the series of close readings that follow.

While this is in no formal sense a study in linguistics, there are two linguistic terms that I shall be using that require at least rudimentary definition. The first, "pragmatics", refers to a branch of modern linguistics which can be summarised in the following formula:

$$\text{PRAGMATICS} = \text{MEANING} - \text{TRUTH CONDITIONS (Levinson 12).}$$

What this formula means is that pragmatics accounts for elements of meaning that remain after all semantic considerations have been accounted for. It is also useful to consider that, in terms of the discipline of linguistics as a whole, pragmatics occupies a space between semantics and sociolinguistics. Levinson identifies five constituent principles, or key concepts, of pragmatics: deixis, conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and conversational structure. We have already encountered the concept of speech acts, or performative utterances, in the chapters on metadrama in Part II, and speech act theory—by which words uttered in certain contexts and formulae are credited with “illocutionary force”, giving them the factitive power of deeds—has been utilised with sufficient frequency in works of literary criticism over the last three decades or so not to need further discussion here.

The term “implicature”, however, is less commonly used in literary studies. The philosopher Paul Grice introduced the term to describe a context-based extra-linguistic phenomenon in which there is no obvious semantic connection between the linguistic properties of an utterance and the proposition the hearer is (intended) to recover from it, as in the following exchange:

A: Did I get invited to the conference?  
B: Your paper was too long.

in which it may be concluded that the meaning of B’s utterance as an answer to A’s question is “Speaker A did not get invited to the conference” (Blakemore 123). Speaker A will also be engaged in an act of explicature, prompting necessary contextual inferences to enrich B’s answer to something like “No, I’m sorry to say that you did not get invited to the conference because your paper was too long and it is a fact that if your paper is too long for the conference you will not be invited”. The information implicit in the utterance draws on assumed knowledge shared by the identities designated to the deictic shifters “you” and “I”. But because the proposition “Speaker A did not get invited to the conference” has first to be derived from an utterance that does not explicitly express that proposition through its linguistic properties, the above exchange is primarily an example of implicature. Implicature is interesting because in a sense it ought to cause misunderstanding yet rarely does. In fact, we use it constantly in ordinary conversation, which suggests that implicature is a necessary factor enhancing effective communicative economy. It will be seen in the close readings that follow that the economy of implicature is a key feature in the strikingly dramatic poems of the Donne canon.

Like implicature “deixis” is a linguistic feature that depends upon shared contextual knowledge between speaker and listener in order to become meaningful.

Deictic or indexical expressions include nouns and adverbs of time such as “yesterday”, “today”, “now”, “next year”, which are obviously indeterminate in isolation but acquire specific reference given the combined frame of context comprising such factors as speaker and hearer identity, and the time and place in which the utterance occurs (Kearns 272). Other deictic or indexical expressions, sometimes referred to as “shifters” include nouns and adverbs of place (“here”, “there”), demonstratives (“this”, “that”, “those”), and personal pronouns and possessives (“I”, “me”, “you”, “him”, “his”, “her”, “they”, and so on). Personal pronouns are of particular interest in the study of Early Modern English because of the distinction between the singular and plural forms for the second person (“thou/thee”, “you” respectively). The singular form was used when informally addressing an intimate acquaintance such as an immediate family member, a lover, a child, or even a domestic servant. At times, though, as can be seen from authentic texts such as personal letters from the period, the two forms are mixed depending upon the topic at hand. As a poet Donne finds occasion to use such a technique of pronominal modulation. In “The Flea”, for example, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, he can be seen to utilise a technique of alternating between the informal and formal forms for rhetorical purposes and dramatic effect.

## Chapter Eight

### Inferring the Dramatic in Donne

Many of the poems I shall be analysing in this chapter are, like “The Flea”, among the better-known of the Donne corpus. I shall make further comments about my selection of poems later, but here it is sufficient to say that I believe they best exemplify many of the issues raised in the background theory (the review of literature that comprises Part I and Part II of the the thesis) in view of the focal theory drawn from the linguistic sub-field of pragmatics that I have just outlined. To begin with, however, I shall discuss a lesser known and generally overlooked poem: “Eclogue 1613. December 26” provides a useful starting point because it gives us probably the best indication as to what Donne’s dramatic verse would have been like, had he chosen to write plays (although it does not, strictly speaking, conform to the conventions of dramatic verse in the Elizabethan or Jacobean sense as it is not written blank verse). The poem is a dramatic dialogue written as a preface, or, more accurately, a framing device for an epithalamion to celebrate the marriage of the newly divorced Countess of Essex to Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, an event that caused considerable scandal. Not without its merits, the poem is not one of Donne’s best, yet some of the elements that he utilises in this quasi-play are also to be found in his more celebrated dramatic lyrics. Interestingly, the eclogue is not particularly dramatic in the sense of showing rather than telling; the prose introduction or stage direction that presents the two speaking characters and sets the scene could have been incorporated in the dialogue itself by a great dramatic writer such as Shakespeare. Donne himself manages such embedded induction in some of his better poems, as I shall demonstrate, but this skill has not been utilised here. The poem is, after all, an attempt at formal dramatic verse, and Donne accordingly uses rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter throughout. But unlike the *Anniversaries*, for example, which are equally regular in their meter, the eclogue displays something of the colloquial, conversational tone of the dramatic lyrics. In this respect the opening has much in common with those of poems such as “The Canonization”, “The Sunne Rising”, or “Batter My Heart”; the irregularly stressed syllables and enjambment belie the pentametric pulse and the utterance is interrogative in mood, reproachful and confrontational in tone, thereby setting up a dialectic sense of dramatic conflict *in media res*:

Unseasonable man, statue of ice,  
What could to countryies solitude entice  
Thee, in this yeares cold and decrepit time? (1-3)<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> All quotations from poems by Donne are taken from Patrides, C.A., ed. *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*. London: Dent, 1985. I have accordingly adhered to Patrides’s spelling, punctuation, and title formatting, except where otherwise indicated.

While the reader is told (rather than shown) the names of the characters, Allophanes and Idios, in the narrative introduction, it remains necessary to infer the relationship obtaining between the two men. Unlike the better dramatic lyrics, however, the eclogue offers little in the way of implicature to help the reader in this respect. This is not necessarily to be seen as a weakness of the poem, however, as the characters are types in a quasi-pastoral, the ingenuity of which lies in the fact that the convention of the pastoral is turned on its head as the poem celebrates the urban world of the court at the expense of the rural setting that is the traditional ideal of the genre. The poem is, of course, a witty posturing, a piece of flattery and, given that Idios, “a private man, one who has no part in public affairs” (Smith 1971 458) is a possible cipher for the poet himself, either an elaborate sycophantic apology or a well-disguised send-up. Indeed, the interpolator of the apology, Allophanes, is “one who has the appearance of another” (Smith 1971 458) and this should at least alert us to a potential ambiguity. Certainly, Allophanes’ reproach is rhetorically flawed insofar as he is criticising Idios for being in the countryside without explaining his own presence there.

Idios’s deictic references (before and after the epithalamion proper) to “this poor song” (103) and “this song” (226) refer principally, of course, to the epithalamion that he offers within the dramatic action of the dialogue, but I suggest it also bears ironic, metadramatic undercurrents, namely that the work acknowledges its own self-consciously propensity for performance. Also, the first reference to “this poor song” lacks an antecedent, other than the equally deictic and almost equally indeterminate “this nuptiall song” (99), also lacking a grammatical antecedent. The eclogue is therefore metadramatic to precisely the same degree as “The Indifferent”, which in its final stanza announces itself, through the speaker, as a song, a literary utterance, rather than an interpersonal enunciation. Such a device has the effect of embedding that which precedes it within the context generated by this new information. The reader is thereby forced to some extent to reinterpret the whole poem up to this point. This does not necessarily surprise the reader; on the contrary, it is likely to have the effect of a notification by the poet through the speaker that he wants the reader to be aware of his, the poet’s, presence in the form of his artifice. The effect is a kind of self-advertisement common amongst coterie poets; a humble acknowledgement of the limitations of his craft that also ingeniously transcends those limitations by engulfing the world he has just created and turning it into a paradox, a logical contradiction, as if to say “yes, I know it’s just a poem, but it’s intriguingly clever, don’t you think?” Idios’ final speech in the eclogue achieves just this. Donne uses two paradoxical notions here that can be found elsewhere in his secular poems: first, the speaker claims to have had no words to



address the event that is his current theme, thus emphasising the paradoxical nature of the ineffability topos as a metadramatic device; second, this notion is conjoined, through the powerful metaphor of a man lacking in words as “a grave / Of his owne thoughts” (94), with the speaker’s equally paradoxical claim that he too is, metaphorically, “dead, and buried” (101). A degree of replication is evident here, as the speaker effectively represents himself in telescopic terms as a grave within a grave. Equally telescopic is his reference to “this poor song” (103), which shows that he is aware of the poem, indeed that his present enunciation is a part of that poem, just as when, in “The Indifferent”, the speaker announces that “*Venus* heard me sigh this song” (19). What Donne achieves in both cases is a vertiginous use of the principle of withdrawal and return. The speaker alerts the reader to the fact that he has been speaking from a fictional locus, yet continues to do so, and the effect is as bewildering to the astute as it is delightful to the ingenuous. Thus is poetry seen to self-reflexively comment upon itself, while the poetic enunciation is given the credit for the dramatic actualisation of the speaker and, implicitly, the poet himself.

Because *Idios* and *Allophanes* reappear after the eleven sections of celebratory verse (in all but one MS, according to Patrides [208n]), the eclogue functions not so much as an introduction or overture to the epithalamion, but more as a frame or container, a kind of metadramatic stage upon which the epithalamion is set (and any potential allusion to jewellery in that term also seems fitting). This consideration establishes a telescopic set of relations between the eclogue and the epithalamion proper, in accord with the metadramatic principles of replication and withdrawal and return. Indeed, the word *eclogues* seems etymologically and conventionally to support such telescopic relations. Abrams tells us that within poetic convention “eclogue” is synonymous with “pastoral”, deriving from the title of Virgil’s pastorals, and that the literal meaning of the word is “a selection” (127). The name of the sub-genre is therefore germane both to the dramatic dialogue between *Allophanes* and *Idios* (a quasi-pastoral), and to the “selection” of discreet, enumerated verses contained therein. The quasi-pastoral aspect of the poem, in creating a town/country polarity, seems to say something about the essential absence, or abnegation of presence, inherent in the literary artefact. Theatrical performance is a medium that rectifies this problematic erasure of presence. Moreover, literature’s paradoxical need to restore the presence it erases is hinted at in Sidney’s *An Apologie for Poetrie*, in which he proposes that a poem is, or should be, “a speaking picture”, a notion that is expressed in specifically dramatic terminology in Van den Berg’s concept of the poem as a theatre of the mind.

*Theatrum mundi* arises in the eclogue in the form of a microcosm/macrocosm trope dependent upon the *liber mundi* or cosmic book-of-creatures topos (with a possible pun on “epi-tome”):

As man is of the world, the heart of man,  
Is an epitome of God's great booke  
Of creatures, and man need no farther looke (50-2)

Idios is using this topos to argue that he is not really away from the court because the country, being the domain of nature, is an epitome of the court. He thus attempts to defend himself against Allophanes' accusation. The latter's response, however, unequivocally demolishes such synecdochic reasoning with a catalogue of counter arguments beginning with the following:

Dreamer, thou art,  
Think't thou fantastique that thou hast a part  
In the East-Indian fleet, because thou hast  
A little spice, or Amber in thy taste? (55-8)

This rhetorical riposte, worthy of a Portia or a Shylock, is especially evocative of Donne's famous contemporary, given that the poem contains several passages that echo well-known moments from Shakespeare's plays. Allophanes' previous speech, in particular, is resonant in its imagery of early scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. This cluster of evocative phrases begins with the powerful exemplar of the extramission theory commonplace contained in the metaphor "those wombs of stars, the Bride's bright eyes" (25). Similarly, "And from their jewels torches do take fire" (31) is reminiscent of "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! / It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (*Romeo and Juliet* I.v.44-46), while, "And make our Court an everlasting east" (38) is similarly reminiscent of "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (II.ii.2). And as a kind of punctuation mark terminating these brief excursions into other literary worlds, "Dreamer, thou art" (55) has the effect of signalling the element of metadramatic withdrawal beyond, and subsequent return to, the "normal" world of non-metadramatic poetic similitude.

Meanwhile, an earlier reference to the sun, "The Sunne stayes longer up" (16), is a semi-metaphoric signifier representing the king, as Smith points out (1971 459). This figure, in its close textual proximity to "First, zeale to Prince and State" (18) is similar in lexicon to "The Sunne Rising", in which the speaker claims, "She's all States, and all Princes, I" (21). Indeed, kingship is a preoccupation that Donne's love lyrics share with Renaissance drama. Given this preoccupation, it is possible to see that the speaker in "The Sunne Rising" is playing heavily on that secondary meaning ("sun" equals "king"), which notion supports the reading below in which the speaker emerges not only as a jubilant lover, but also implicitly as a potential pretender to secular power. In addition to a celebration of love, "The Sunne Rising" also reads almost as a usurper's claim to the throne and the title, if interpreted as "the king rising", could just

as easily refer to the speaker himself as his addressee. The dynamics are dramatically Hal-like, as the arrogant young speaker, sensing his ascendancy, flexes his muscles and challenges established authority.

With its vivid sense of an enclosed interior space and suffused lighting from without (because the rays do not enter the room directly but through curtains), the aubade “The Sunne Rising” is one of the finest exemplars of Donne’s dramatic economy. The poem’s closing line, “This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare” practically invokes the archetypal image of the Shakespearean playhouse (although it should be noted that Shakespeare wrote for many different playhouses with differing spatial configurations), with the bed serving as the rectangular stage within the confines of a circular structure functioning as a miniature cosmos from which the quotidian world of work and business is excluded. This sense of microcosmic architectural containment also serves to place the lovers, who presumably occupy the bed, centre stage, thus invoking the notion of the centrality of the actor. This poem, of all the *Songs and Sonets*, is most deserving of Sidney’s epithet “picture in words”. Yet, oddly, the words themselves do not account, in terms of imagery, for the strong sense of dramatic presence readers of the poem experience. The scene, on the contrary, is set with the utmost economy and an almost total absence of descriptive detail: we are merely told that there are windows, curtains (an image with potentially theatrical connotations), a bed, walls, and, of course, the unwelcome light of dawn that illuminates the spatial set while also indirectly providing the temporal setting by indicating the end of a night, possibly the first, shared by the lovers. As with the Shakespearean playhouse and, often, the modern stage, the poetic audience, or reader, is required to imagine those details that are lacking in a minimalist set design. This task is often aided by cues in the script, although these too are most effective when not fully specified. The set is therefore like a canvas upon which the artist has sketched a few lines just sufficient to delegate to his poetic audience the task of adding colour and detail. The challenge to the reader to draw inferences from the text in this way highlights the importance of implicature to Donne’s dramatic economy. Sparseness of description with regard to setting also has the advantage of allowing a total focus upon the *dramatis personae* and the dramatic action of the poem.

Because “The Sunne Rising” is not a narrative poem, the reader is not introduced to the speaker through descriptive or discursive elements of the text. Our understanding of who he is relies totally upon what he says. This process, furthermore, can only be achieved through the active collusion of a reader whose interpretative faculties are guided rather than controlled. As with the sketchiness of the information we are given regarding the poem’s setting, so the speaker’s identity and character is achieved through the inferential procedures surrounding the use of deictic elements such as personal pronouns and verbs of motion, and within the context of poetic and social

convention. I shall begin, then, with what I propose are the logical assumptions that the speaker is male, a lover, young, metropolitan, urbane, and socially located somewhere between the merchant middle class and the nobility (implied both in his condescension towards apprentices and others and his figurative, hyperbolic use of royal titles—"Kings" [19], "Princes" [21]—to describe his, and his lover's, exalted state). At the moment of utterance it is also likely that he is in bed naked with his lover.

This speaker rarely uses the first person singular pronoun and even when he does it is often in phrases or clauses also containing a third person pronoun denoting a female presence, as in the lines "But that *I* would not lose *her* sight so long" (14) and "*She*'s all States, and all Princes, *I*" (21). Typically, though, he uses the first person plural, thus identifying himself first and foremost as one of a couple: "Why dost thou thus / Through windowes, and through curtaines call on *us*" (2-3); "Princes doe but play *us*" (23); "Thou sunne art halfe as happy' as *we*"; "thy duties be / To warme the world, that's done in warming *us*. / Shine here to *us*, and thou art every where" (27-9, my emphasis throughout). Pronouns generally refer back to an antecedent, as does "thou" (2) to "Busy old fool, unruly Sunne" (1). The primary referent of "us" (3) however is not specified until "lovers seasons" (3), and then only through implicature. The sentence does not grammatically provide any guarantee that "us" refers to the lovers whose possessive-adjectival presence in the following line is, for all we know, hypothetical, illustrative, as opposed to referential in a straightforward sense.

From the speaker's rather oblique references to himself we are able only to infer that he is male and that he is a lover. The remaining more detailed information that I have proffered about him can only be inferred in conjunction with other inferences pertaining to the addressee, the third party (the beloved), and a cast of (potentially) thousands of "extras" and "walk-ons". The addressee in particular is crucial in the exposition of facts pertaining to the scene that the poem sets, despite the fact that he (the ageing sun) is no more than an eccentric apostrophe, an affected witticism, on the part of the speaker. The opening lines identify this unlikely addressee vocatively, while also establishing the poem's central conceit, casting the sun as a *senex*, a semi-senile father-figure whose powers are on the wane as he rapidly approaches his dotage. This device is trebly dramatic: the *senex* is a first and foremost a traditional theatrical type that also has secondary connections with the *theatrum humanae vitae* or seven-ages-of-man topos. Shakespeare's Polonius provides a more fleshed out version of the same type, and Jaques's depiction of the sixth age explicates with startling accuracy the exact kind of character Donne's conceit merely implies:

The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide

For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
 And whistles in his sound. (*As You Like It* II, vii, 156-62)

Thirdly, the line “Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?” (4) contains an additional theatrical motif, as “motions” in a dramatic context casts the sun as a puppet-master who controls the actions of marionettes.

As a dramatic induction, the set up of the conceit of the sun as *senex* is marvellously economical. The figure is a combination of metaphor, prosopopoeia and apostrophe. The latter aspect means that the speaker does not have to spell out the other aspects of the conceit in a narrative, non-dramatic manner. Because the trope emanates from the enunciation addressed to an agent established in the process of that enunciation, no copulative verb is required to equate the tenor “sun” with the vehicle “busy old fool” as with conventional metaphor, for example. The reproachful outpouring that begins the poem is also dramatic in the sense that it has the effect of presenting a situation *in media res*, and the reader, like a theatre audience, has to piece together just what that situation is solely from what is said by the character(s) in the ensuing scene. Donne achieves this with an economy that renders the verse remarkably concise even by the standards of lyric poetry. The opening is dramatic, too, in its use of natural speech rhythms and colloquial idioms.

Like all types or “flat” characters, Donne’s “[b]usie old foole” is really a foil for the protagonist, and further inferences about the speaker in “The Sunne Rising” may be drawn from what is said to the addressee and the manner in which it is said. One of the first things the reader might reasonably infer about the speaker from his apostrophe to the personified sun is that he is disrespectful towards his elders, an altogether insufferably arrogant young pup. His tone is that of a young pretender ready to depose an ageing ruler and claim *his* place in the sun. This may sound contradictory: the speaker is, after all, objecting in no uncertain terms to the interruption of his lovemaking by the sun’s arrival. But despite his ostensible rejection of the outside world, something about the arrogance of his tone, together with the fact that his imagery keeps returning to worldly concerns, smacks of ambition. If there is anything autobiographical to be read into this poem, moreover, it is, I suggest, precisely that sense of a speaker who seeks advancement in the very circles he appears to spurn.

The adjectives used to describe the sun, “busy”, “old”, and “unruly”, are surely the antithesis of how the speaker sees himself. He is set apart from the mundane business of the world, for his is in the exalted state of love. He is young, and it is likely that the love he is celebrating is new in order to warrant such posturing. “Unruly” is interesting because it assumes the authority to judge, indeed to rule, and therefore nicely foreshadows the solipsistic hyperbole of the line “She’s all States, and all Princes, I”

(21). It also introduces the concept of social convention upon which the central conceit hinges. It is unacceptable, the speaker protests, to come visiting people first thing in the morning, especially young lovers. All the protocols of polite society are being broken, and the lovers are exalted even beyond the King, who plays a minor role offstage among the “[l]ate schoole boyes”, “sowre prentices” (80) and other mechanicals and rustic types who are presumably more deserving of the effrontery of a rude early-morning awakening. Donne’s dramatic economy dictates that these hypothetical extras not only diacritically locate the lovers by juxtaposing their serene interior world and a bustling workaday exteriority but also by implying the dawn temporal setting rather than have his speaker spell it out. The world outside the discreetly drawn curtains is also interesting in that it seems to stretch from a fairly urban environment of schoolboys and apprentices to the rural realm of court hunts and beyond that to a countryside which is rustic and sweaty rather than pastoral and sublime. Indeed, rural spaces were close enough to London in Donne’s time for this to seem a realistically scaled continuum. All these images, throwaway as they are, serve to imply that the lovers’ location is, by contrast, metropolitan, sophisticated, and genteel. One is reminded of Van den Berg’s thoughts about *theatrum mundi* and the metropolis, the theatricality of urban life, the conflict between private selves and public masks and Braudel’s formula for the solipsistic celebration of the urban microcosm with the cry “The town is a world in itself”. But even the splendour of the city is mere vulgarity, and too commonplace a backdrop for Donne’s lovers. More exotic places, “both the’Indias of spice and Myne” (17), are conjured up to disassociate the lovers from the mundane English morning outside their window, and in so doing provide a metaphoric vehicle to represent the beloved: a sweet-smelling treasure, we are left in no doubt. The figure also has the effect of momentarily importing those distant worlds into the lovers’ chamber.

But despite his arrogance, Donne’s speaker is saved from becoming an unsympathetic character from the poetic audience’s point-of-view by his change of tone towards the end of the final stanza with the lines, “Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee / To warme the world, that’s done in warming us” (27-8). Here he softens, showing both some respect and consideration for the unlikely persona he has invented. The device also returns the poem’s focus to the microcosm/macrocosm aspect of the central conceit which is also, of course, a diacritical commonplace of courtly love. The assertion that most serves to separate the lovers from other mere mortals is “Princes do but play us” (23). The obvious theatrical reference is resonant of the *theatrum mundi* topos and the strength of the assertion is reinforced by the layering of that conventional trope with the microcosm/macrocosm commonplace also entailed.

The concession the speaker makes towards the end of the poem that the sun has been of some use after all by warming the lovers and, in doing so, the whole world, adds a subtle touch of the erotic, implying, as it does, that the lovers are in need of

heating because they are naked. A further potential implication, however, is that the speaker acknowledges that, despite his earlier protests, the night of love-making is finished, otherwise he would surely not be in need of warming. Such a reading, moreover, warms the reader to the speaker as it introduces a hint of self-mockery which suggests that the whole poetic utterance is perhaps really nothing more than a joke, presumably intended to amuse the other important character on stage: the speaker's mistress, whose presence is only apparent deictically, through pronominal reference, and figuratively in metaphor.

The woman for whose benefit the speaker goes to such length is only referred to in the third person. Her participatory role in the scene is tantalisingly uncertain: is she still asleep, or is she the conscious beneficiary of her lover's witty diatribe? Does the speaker know? Perhaps he is attempting to amuse her, unsure of whether she is asleep or awake. Or maybe he is pretending that he believes her to be asleep to make the compliments he pays her indirectly—"I would not lose her sight so long" (14), "tell mee, / Whether both the 'Indias of spice and Myne / Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee" (16-18), "She's all States, and all Princes, I" (21)—seem all the more genuine, given that he is also pretending to assume that she cannot hear them. The microcosm/macrocsm commonplace is evident in these lines, and it is particularly interesting to note the metaphoric reciprocity of the "Indias" trope. Is the geographic reference a vehicle representing the beloved, or vice versa? On a microcosmic level, I suggest, the former relation obtains, but microcosmically, deep within the machinations of the governing conceit, Donne's dramatic economy dictates that the woman become the vehicle representing the entire scene and, spatially, the entire world, hence "She's all States, and all Princes, I" (21). It is perhaps conventionally appropriate, even on a mythological level, that the woman represents and is represented by the earth (and if she is all the world then she is also a stage) while her male counterpart, the speaker, is equated with almost omnipresent governmental power ("and all Princes, I"). Again, the choice of material for the speaker's imagery invokes a sense of his worldly ambition.

His mistress's relative lack of presence in the poem also has the effect, however, of making us question the speaker's true motive for making the poetic utterance. The beloved is, one might conclude, like the sun, nothing more than a foil to be exploited by an egocentric and self-dramatising persona. In appearing to disdain the world in the name of love, is he not, we might ask, just breezily advertising his superiority as a man of the world? This seems likely, indeed, given the reasonable inferences that he is a young gentleman of considerable means, possibly a man of the court, haughty to a degree, self-aware of his social standing, and capable of administering a stern rebuke, yet also capable of flattery, good humoured self-deprecation, and showing compassion towards his inferiors. It is not difficult to imagine the effect a poem like "The Sunne Rising" was meant to have upon the coterie

readership amongst whom it would have been circulated. This kind of poetry is designed to amuse, certainly, but also to impress. Locating the reader and his or her role in the poem thus remains the final task to be performed in this analysis.

Unlike the three internal characters of the poem—the speaker, the personified sun, and the woman—the reader as poetic audience is not easily located within the playing space that the poem creates for itself. The speaker and his mistress are, of course, in a bedroom behind drawn curtains. We do not know whether the bedroom is his or hers, and poetic convention—Petrarchan, Platonic, and courtly—together with a total absence in the poem of any implicature to the contrary suggests that it would be wrong to assume that the couple are married. The sun is located precisely outside the window; he cannot see in because of the drawn curtains, but it is reasonable to assume, at least for the purposes of the conceit, that he is able to hear the words the speaker addresses to him. Eavesdropper he thus may be but voyeur he is not. It is perhaps tempting to deduce that the reader is placed along with the sun, outside of the main playing area, but there are no deictic indicators to support such a theory. Rather, the audience is not physically placed anywhere and is therefore imaginatively free to position itself in the action it witnesses in the form of a dialogue (or monologue) overheard, rather like the audience of a radio play. And like radio, the dramatic lyric is perfectly suited to utilising dramatic devices such as strategic concealment and partial disclosure. The fact that we as readers can know little about what the woman is doing, for example, can be considered a strength rather than a weakness. As modern readers, for example, we may feel either outraged or amused by the fact that her presence has been all but erased or rhetorically subordinated by an overbearing, chauvinistic speaker. On the other hand, we may be touched (as I suspect Donne's contemporaries may have been) by the notion that the speaker is tactfully protecting the identity of his mistress. Donne is notable for his ability to make strategic use of a tension arising between vividness and indeterminacy, authorial presence and reader response, and this is particularly evident in his dramatic lyrics. Thus the dramatic strength of the poem can be seen to depend not only upon the wealth of inference the reader is able to draw from the text, but also upon implicature's limitations and scope for ambiguity.

"The Flea" is a unique and striking exemplar of Donne's dramatic economy. Unlike "The Sunne Rising" the mistress in "The Flea" is a leading character, rather than a mute foil for a posturing protagonist. Through the use of implicature, Donne's speaker attributes dynamic dramatic action and even dialogue to the addressee. The result is one of the most memorable poems in the Donne corpus and, arguably, in the entire canon of English Renaissance literature.

No indication is given in "The Flea" as to a specific physical setting. This is partially a matter of economy, as the poet has clearly intuited, rightly, that the dramatic action the reader is invited to infer from the "script" is sufficiently evocative not to



require any such reference. But the lack of setting also has a second, practical function. It allows the speaker to frame a conceit whereby the flea in question is represented metaphorically in spatial terms without the risk of cluttering that vehicle with competing spatial imagery. Figuratively and rhetorically, moreover, the flea actually constitutes both the physical setting of this dramatic lyric and the stage upon which it is enacted. The following couplet, situated textually at the centre of the poem, economically utilises the flea's capacity as a metaphoric vehicle and tenor respectively: "This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is" (12-3). This reciprocity of a vehicle and tenor dynamics is very much in keeping with the mirror-like quality of the *theatrum mundi* topos incorporating the world-as-theatre/theatre-as-world metaphor. Such mirroring also provides a sense of dialectic exchange which adds to the dynamic sense of dramatic dialogue that the poem evokes. The notion that the flea is the lovers also alludes, of course, to the microcosm/macrocosm commonplace. Indeed, it is as an exponent of this commonplace that the flea poem sub-genre has a place in the annals of poetic convention.

Poems about fleas were a fashionable sub-genre in sixteenth-century Europe, and the earliest known model dates back to antiquity (although it should be noted that "*Carmen de pulice*" was probably *not* written by Ovid, as was once thought). As Helen Gardner notes, "[t]he poet either wishes to be a flea or he envies the flea its death at his mistress's hand and on her bosom" (1965 174). Donne's treatment of the convention is characteristically more sophisticated and eclectic, and subsequently "may be read as a Petrarchan tribute, a libertine entrapment, or a true lover's persuasion" (DiPasquale 175). In other words it at once displays aspects of the Ovidian, Petrarchan, and neoplatonist traditions. The poem also has a distinctly dialogical quality that adds to its dramaticity. The opening of the second and third stanzas are clearly responses to actions (in theatrical terminology "business") performed by the addressee "in the white spaces between the stanzas" (DiPasquale 175). By implicating her responses to his lines in their very utterance (lines which are in turn uttered in response to her actions) "The Flea" is Donne's most vivid example of the use of dramatic economy to script and stage an implied dialogue. The spaces between the stanzas are, as DiPasquale suggests, spaces in which the mistress's lines and stage directions are to be asserted, through cleverly directed inferences, by the reader.

Turning first to the speaker, how is he dramatised, and how does this character compare with the speaker of "The Sunne Rising", for example? The first self-referencing pronoun appears in the opening couplet: "Marke but this flea, and marke in this, / How little that which thou deny'st me is". The pronoun is accusative or objective case; from the outset this speaker defines himself not as the agent of his own actions but as the passive subject of the actions of the addressee. Yet this denial of agency is in contrast with the assertiveness implicit in the imperative mood of the opening lines, thus

creating a tension between what might be considered the poem's masculine and feminine elements. The first action attributed to the woman, moreover, is negative. She is denying him something, but at this stage we as readers cannot be sure what it is because "that" has no antecedent. Readers acquainted with the flea poem sub-genre as part of the convention in love poetry whereby the poem is a witty attempt at seduction are likely to infer, however, that the speaker is talking about sexual favours. Those unaware of the sub-genre will probably realise that this is the case by the end of the first stanza by dint of explicitly bawdy references apparent in "loss of maidenhead" (6), "enjoyes before it wooe" (7), and "swells with one blood made of two" (8).

The opening line's double imperative with the repetition of "marke" sets a didactic, almost pedantic, tone rather like that of "A Lecture upon the Shadow" although the mood of the poem is quite different. Nonetheless, the choice of that particular verb serves to characterise the speaker as one adopting the vocabulary of a lecturer (it becomes apparent that he is not really a lecturer), thus assuming a strong rhetorical stance. Similarly, the repetition in the first line of "this" is ambiguous enough to add to the poem's dramatic economy. The most obvious reading is that the second "this" relates to the antecedent "flea" in accord with the earlier usage of "this" as a proximal demonstrative adjective in attributive relation to the noun phrase head "flea". There is, however, a possible alternative interpretation that is more metadramatic. It is possible that the second "this" refers not back to the antecedent "flea" but forward to the remainder of the utterance, that is to say, the poem itself. Such a reading is more satisfying because it helps dramatise the speaker in a way that is self-mocking of his own rhetoric. It has the effect of imbuing the words "and mark in this" with an implicature expressing something along the lines of "what I am about to say has nothing to do with any scholarly interest in the anatomy or behaviour of fleas; rather, it is intended to make you see that going to bed with me is not as bad an idea as you might think". This reading lends the poem an added sense of fun because the reader can infer that the speaker has, whether inadvertently or intentionally, given the game away to some extent. Indeed, one of the interesting questions about "The Flea" is what happens after the poem finishes. In other words, is the attempt at seduction ultimately successful or not? This is a matter readers have to decide for themselves "as any undergraduate will testify", according to DiPasquale (175). We know, moreover, that Donne is capable of letting his speakers make self-deprecating, metadramatic references to the practice of the poet's craft, as the opening lines of "The triple Foole" testify: "I am two fooles, I know, / For loving, and for saying so / In whining poëtry".

The reader learns more about the speaker of "The Flea" in the second stanza from the line "Where wee almost, yea more then maryed are" (11). This is a good example of what Nicholas Jones calls the "coining effect" in which the metre of a line is interrupted as a new thought is introduced, as if the speaker were in the process of

having that thought for the first time. The information the reader receives is in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: the speaker and the addressee are “almost . . . married”. The pause, which is usually indicated by a comma before the emphatic “yea more then”, is like a stage direction built into the dialogue which would probably read “*checks himself*” if explicated. It is as if the speaker realises that, given the rhetorical intentionality of the utterance to get his beloved into bed, he is being too prosaic despite the fact that they are (as yet) not married, an unusual consideration in the poetry of Donne’s time. Remembering that the truth has no place in the art of seduction, he then resorts to the hyperbolic assertion that the couple are “more then married” which is, of course, a quite meaningless intensifier. Also available is the inference from the verb “to marry” which incorporates consummation as an essential part, or extension, of the ceremony itself. In this respect “more than married” can be seen, in emphasising that connotation, to incorporate a redundancy, for, in the sense proposed, to be married means more than just having attended a wedding ceremony and taking marriage vows.

The speaker uses the familiar or intimate second person singular pronoun “thou” when addressing his beloved, much as one would expect. Yet he does so only in the first and third of the poem’s three stanzas. In the second he uses the more formal, less intimate “you”. The effect in this central stanza is that the speaker distances himself from the addressee, and as his rhetoric becomes more far fetched it is as if he would like her to forget that he has a self-interested motive for persuading her. Switching from “thou” to “you” is not uncommon in Early Modern English when a speaker or letter writer shifts from domestic subjects to matters outside the immediate family. Accordingly, the shift in this stanza is from the more immediate situation regarding the impending fate of the flea to the hypothetical and elaborate conceit: “This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is” (12-13). It is as if the speaker is pretending to accept the terms of the addressee’s coyness by adopting the less intimate form of address, although it could be argued that the use of the first person plural in this stanza counters the distancing effect of the use of “you”. The more formal mode of address, in addition to being more respectfully solicitous, could also be interpreted as an indication that the speaker is attempting in a sense to emotionally blackmail the addressee. For, if it is assumed that his intended likes and expects him to address her as “thou”, then the pronominal shift could well imply that unless she yields to his request for sexual favours she is in danger of losing his love altogether. This distancing or self-erasure is appropriate given the hyperbolic suggestion of her killing him as practically a *fait accompli*: “Though use make you apt to kill mee” (16). The familiar bawdy metaphor equating death and orgasm and the conventional play on “use” are also implied here, adding a hint of wishful thinking to the import of the line. The speaker’s apparent lack of self interest becomes an obvious rhetorical ruse in the final couplet of the stanza where he affects concern only for her life and soul: “Let not to that, selfe

murder added bee, / And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three” (17-18). The third stanza shows another pronominal shift and a subsequent change of tone. As Gardner notes, “[t]he reversion to the familiar singular pronoun marks a change from the pleading and respectful tone of the opening of the second stanza, marked by the change to the plural form” (1965 175).

As for the addressee, we learn in the first stanza merely that she is reluctant to grant the speaker sexual favours, but it is the opening lines of the second and third stanzas that breathe life into this character. In the former the speaker urges her to refrain from killing the flea: “Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare” (10). This moment is doubly dramatic: it implies, of course, that she appears as if she is about to kill the flea, and it additionally suggests that she has not been moved by his initial attempt at seductive persuasion and the moment is therefore comedic, as the reader can imagine the speaker’s frustration in response to so assertive an indication on the addressee’s part that his elaborate argument has so far failed to convince her to sleep with him. The space between the second and third stanzas is similarly given over to dramatic action in the form of responses by the addressee. Here, of course, the reader learns that she has indeed killed the flea, although the speaker only tells us indirectly, through an exclamation followed by a rhetorical question: “Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since / Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?” (19-20). The picture that emerges is of a woman wilful, independent, and headstrong; “Yet thou triumph’st” (23) implies that she is not only unrepentant for having killed the flea but also jubilant at having the intellectual (and, perhaps, moral) fortitude not to be duped by the speaker’s argument. The fact that she claims, we are told, not to find either herself or the speaker any “the weaker” (24) for having been bitten by the flea is testimony to the sanguine robustness of both the woman and the insect. The speaker remains resilient despite her stubbornness, suggesting perhaps that he really rather enjoys the challenge and is secretly admiring of the fact that his beloved has a mind of her own. His undaunted reference to the time “when thou yeeld’st to me” (26) shows that he is as single-minded as she, although readers may well surmise that the elaborate attempt at seduction is doomed to failure because the addressee is more in control of the situation than the speaker.

The metaphysical wit of “The Flea” is apparent in the far-fetched conceit by which the flea becomes a metaphoric vehicle for “Our mariage bed, and mariage temple” (13). This spatial figure is both architectural and dramatic, for both the marriage bed and temple are the scenes of ceremonial action: the nuptials that consummate the ceremony and the ceremony itself. Both locations imply interior settings, the marriage bed in a bed-chamber and the marriage ceremony inside the temple. The image of the “temple” is also resonant of the body, as in “my body is my temple”, which is appropriate given the fact that the speaker is talking about the body of the flea. The use

of objects to represent the body is also reminiscent of the Holy Sacrament, and DiPasquale has argued that this image and the repeated use of the proximal demonstrative adjective suggests that the religious ceremony is a model for the poem. These references to interior spaces are compounded by “w’are met / And cloystered in these living walls of Jet” (14-15). The image becomes somewhat claustrophobic, especially given that under the grudging eyes of her parents, not to mention her own propensity for coyness, the flea that has bitten them both is the only possible place in which their “two bloods mingled bee” (4). It seems that the lovers might find it difficult to enjoy each other’s intimate company even were she to give her consent. The grudging parents, moreover, are another example of Donne’s dramatic economy as they complete the cast of this dramatic situation while making a definite contribution to its atmosphere and texture. Consequently, “The Flea” is a strange mixture of the courtly and the domestic, a feature which links it with its classical sources. Subjects such as marriage and protective parents do not typically arise in seventeenth-century love poetry. Donne has taken the flea poem and given it an original treatment, combining the hyperbole of a conceit that is fantastically far-fetched and a situation that verges on the burlesque. This is in sharp contrast with the diacritical representation of the lovers in poems such as “The Sunne Rising”.

Gardner observes the almost neoplatonic delicacy combined with a dramatist’s sense of plot development with which Donne handles “a popular subject for erotic verse”:

Donne’s originality transforms this well-worn subject by making the flea bite both him and his mistress, thus making it a symbol not of the lover’s desire but of the desired union. Instead of a languid, erotic fancy, he gives us a witty, dramatic argument” (1965 174).

As a symbol, then, the flea takes on a quasi-religious significance, and this is enhanced by a vocabulary throughout that invokes images of a more cosmic, spiritual drama than that of the mere death of a flea: “sinne” (6), “temple” (13), “cloystered” (15), “sacrilege, three sinnes” (18), “[p]urpled” (indicating the colour associated with passiontide), “naile” (punning on a symbol of the Crucifixion), “blood of innocence” (20). From this last image readers acquainted with Christian imagery are likely to infer potent allusions to the New Testament, especially given the suggestion that the flea is free of guilt (21). The speaker is implying, it seems, that his mistress’s act in killing the flea is tantamount to the Crucifixion and, perhaps, Herod’s slaughter of the innocents. This could have been a dangerously provocative analogy, had it been more explicit, bordering as it does on the blasphemous invocation of the most sacred of Christian images in the profane rhetoric of seduction. In the absence of any danger of such charges, we are likely to consider the religious imagery an exercise in hyperbole that

serves to counteract the equally outrageous, burlesque aspect of the poem's central conceit.

Allusions to biblical events in "The Flea" are complemented by a tripartite structure and specific references to triplicate entities: "three lives" (10), "three sinnes in killing three" (18). The numerical significance of these features would not have been lost on Donne's contemporary readership who would have likely inferred a tacit reference to the Holy Trinity. The poem's tendency towards triplicity is also evident in a triangular aspect of the central motif which adds an extra dimension to the conventional microcosm/macrocosm motif. As a metaphoric vehicle the flea works on two levels simultaneously. On the one hand it functions as a microcosm for the two lovers ("This flea is you and I"); on the other it subsumes the two lovers, and the three of them become a composite vehicle for the greater cosmic drama of the Passion. This secondary figure emerges telescopically from the first, yet its dynamics reciprocate: the lovers cannot be in any serious way a metaphor for the Passion; rather, it becomes an implicit vehicle signifying the lovers, which in turn are embodied in the flea. The triangular relations of this double vehicle effectively distance the tenor (the lovers) from the implicit profundity of the secondary vehicle (the Passion), and the tension created by the double metaphor between potentially sacrilegious hyperbole and indecorous burlesque enhances the "dramatic" aspect, to use Gardner's phrase, of this "witty argument".

Another of the *Songs and Sonets* group which I consider to be intensely dramatic is "The good-morrow". Like "The Sunne Rising", this poem is an aubade, a song sung by lovers to the dawn, but here the greeting is not a lament but a celebration of an awakening that is a metaphor for the experience of new-found love. The beloved is directly addressed, but her presence is far more passive than in, say, "The Flea". This is largely because the poem is concerned with the Platonic ideal of love as union rather than presenting a scene of dramatic conflict in which the motives of the speaker and addressee are at odds. Consequently, the most frequently used pronouns are not "I" or "thou" (when these do occur they are usually conjoined as parts of the same nominative noun phrase) but "we" and "us" and the related first person singular possessive "our".

"The good-morrow" starts dramatically with the speaker's strong colloquial exclamation, "I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I / Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?" The lines are conversational both rhythmically and idiomatically, and the effect is of an *in media res* opening of a play, since the reader is thereby presented with a situation that is already under way and is thereby challenged to discover through inference that which has gone before. This device at once captures the attention and arouses the curiosity. The series of four interrogative clauses that opens the first stanza, moreover, implies that the speaker is perplexed or amazed by the situation in which he

finds himself. The initial “I wonder” therefore functions as a very succinct summary of the whole stanza; and “wonder” connotes not only that the speaker is pondering something he does not understand or cannot imagine, but that he is experiencing a sense of wonder tantamount to an epiphany or religious experience and, moreover, that the feeling the experience evokes is, on a qualitative level, literally “wonderful”.

The first stanza is dramatic insofar as it is concerned with action: the speaker wonders what he and an intimate addressee (denoted pronominally by “thou”) did until they loved. It also suggests an awakening (4) and a coming of age (2-3) with added bawdy connotations cloaked in the vocabulary of biological reproduction, hence “wean’d” and “suck’d”. Such connotations are echoed in the profane pun contained in “country pleasures” (3) which is highly reminiscent of Hamlet’s use of the same pun in the pointed line “Do you think I meant country matters?” (*Hamlet* III.ii.116), where he is deliberately being offensive to Ophelia.

“The good-morrow” makes full dramatic use of the principal of withdrawal and return, playing as it does on a dichotomy between then and now, the time in the past before the lovers found each other and the sublime present of the speaker’s utterance. The former state is presented through constant reference in the opening lines. Return from the immature, green or pastoral world of withdrawal with which the poem begins is foreshadowed by the forward-looking dynamics implicit in the interrogative mood of the opening lines, for questions, even rhetorical ones, invite answers and thus display an awareness of chronological progression. The actual point of return is marked emphatically by “T’was so” and the contrasting deixis of “this” in the clause that follows (5). The sense of withdrawal and return is also enhanced by the allusion to the dream state (7), one of the classic devices for withdrawal and return in drama. The antecedent of the conditional structure containing the metaphorical reference to the dream has the additional function of characterising the speaker as a former womaniser, or rake. Again, the focus is on motive and action: not only did he “see” these other beauties, he also “desir’d” and “got” them. But the fact that the conditional statement might be thought to allude to a purely hypothetical situation helps soften such a characterisation. Alternatively, it could be read as rhetorical implication that the speaker perhaps wants the listener to believe that his former romantic intrigues and sexual encounters, being mere dreams compared to his present love, do not actually count or matter. Despite such reservations, the closing couplet of the first stanza of “The good-morrow” is, to my mind, one of most memorable phrases in all of Donne’s love poetry. Bereft of imagery, apart from the dream metaphor, its sincerity as a compliment to the beloved is borne out by the sweet tone of the remainder of the poem.

The beginning of the second stanza marks the point of return from the dream world of withdrawal that represents the lives of the lovers before finding each other. The moment is immediate, panoramic, and intense; and it achieves this effect in the

absence of imagery. The greeting is a slight variation on the traditional aubade. The speaker does not greet the dawn but his own soul and that of his lover. This adds a spiritual dimension to the poem not dissimilar to that of "The Extasie". The implicature here is that before finding love the couple's souls remained dormant and that love is equivalent to a spiritual awakening.

The microcosm/macrocosm commonplace makes an entrance, appropriately, at the centre of the poem in the line "And makes one little roome, an every where" (11). The lovers are now central to the universe they inhabit, much as in the closing couplet of "The Sunne Rising". This powerful image economically creates an interior setting for the poem. It is at this point that the reader learns for certain that the speaker and his mistress are physically together; there is no longer any possibility that the address is an apostrophe. Readers are also likely to infer that the couple are in bed, having spent their first night together, although, as with "The Sunne Rising", there is no real clue as to whether it is his or her bed chamber. The interior nonetheless remains illuminated by the ecstatically performed speech act that begins the stanza (that of bidding "good morrow" to the "waking souls"). The reciprocal dynamics that the microcosm/macrocosm commonplace shares with the *theatrum mundi* topos is exploited by the juxtaposition of the lovers in their "little roome" with references to "sea-discoverers" and "new worlds" (12). *Mappa mundi* is also invoked in a cartographic reference that hints at the kind of layering, Chinese-box, or telescopic sets of relations pertaining to invocations of possible worlds identified by the metadramatic concepts of "replication" and "dimensionalising": "Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne" (13). The second stanza closes with a familiar, solipsistic application of the microcosm and macrocosm conflation, in a complex line that ultimately reduces the identity of the two lovers to a monad. "Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one" (14) only makes sense if the lovers themselves are identical to each other and to the three ostensibly individual and separate worlds referred to in the line.

Further geographic references in the third stanza: "better hemispheres" (17), "sharpe North", "declining West" (18) gives rise to images of the same kind of conflation, emblematic of love as union, as found in stanza two. This trope (and it is interesting to note that there is no single governing conceit in this poem) is reinforced by references both to extramission theory and the notion of the lovers' images reflected mirror-like in each other's eyes (15) and to alchemy, the mixing of disparate elements, which in turn develops into an eternising conceit to close the poem. The way in which Donne manages to combine these references shows that metaphysical wit and dramatic economy are interdependent. The collage of seemingly unrelated images would not work so well poetically were they not presented in a way that allows them to flow smoothly from one to the next, much like the episodes that punctuate the development of a dramatic plot. There is something metadramatic, moreover, about the final



reference to alchemy—"What ever dyes, was not mixt equally" (19)—as it has something to say about the kind of poetry this is, a veritable *bricolage* of borrowed images gathered together by the magpie poet. On a metadramatic and discursive level, then, the reader may read the message that just as love does not last without balance and harmony, so poetry, especially poetry such as this, will be unsuccessful unless the materials from which the figures are drawn are handled with the utmost artifice and taste.

These observations provide an attractive reading, I suggest, because they allow a further implicature that helps identify the poetic audience, or the reader, in a manner entirely in keeping with the concept of the coterie. If the poem has covert advice for fellow poets, as I believe it does, then that carries the potential implicitly to characterise the intended reader as a fellow poet. Such a reading allows us to imagine ourselves as part of Donne's circle of friends at the Inns of Court and also makes the poem something of a challenge, in the spirit of the cotery, to see if we, as amateur poets, can, better his offering. Subsequently, readers are likely to feel involved in the poetic utterances in a peculiarly dramatic, and metadramatic, way. In addition to being cast as one of the poet's contemporaries, we are also implicated as members of a select group aspiring to a similar "ethos of performance" (borrowing Pebworth's term) as Donne himself. Such a dramatic inclusion of the reader has the additional, economic advantage of countering the relative erasure of the speaker and addressee as autonomous entities upon which the poem relies as a celebration of mutual love.

As with "The Flea", so with "The Canonization" the interpersonal dynamics between speaker and addressee are truly dialogical, with the white space between the stanzas accommodating the implicated responses of the latter. Or rather, it is the speaker who appears to be responding to his companion's objections to his choice of lover. This is one of the most dramatic of the *Songs and Sonets*, since the text functions as a script not only for the speaker but also for his addressee. The *in media res* opening with its remonstrative ejaculation, "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love" is possibly the most striking beginning of any of Donne's love poems. It is especially dramatic in being a retort, as it allows the reader to infer that something has been said before; not only is the poetic audience catapulted into the middle of a dramatic situation, but it is also made aware that that it is in the position of a theatre-goer who has crept in late to a performance already underway. Fortunately, though, the dramatist knows his craft well enough to allow for such contingencies and the latecomer need not fear missing any relevant information. The imperative "hold your tongue", moreover, implies that the addressee is mid-sentence at the time the speaker begins his lines. In this sense the speaker is also an addressee, and through what he says, we readers, the play-going late-comers of the piece, are able to infer what is being said to him and what kind of character he is.

The speaker's plea in the first line to "let me love" tells us that he is a lover, or one who would be a lover were it not for the interference of the person or persons he is addressing, who can be inferred to be typical representatives of the opinions of the world at large, or some portion thereof. Immediately we are struck by the possibility that the speaker has made a bad match, that his chosen lover is somehow inappropriate (although it would be dangerous to read this too autobiographically with regard to Donne's choice of Ann More as a wife). The objections of his companion(s) do imply, nonetheless, that this is no fling. We must assume that the speaker is deadly serious about pursuing a relationship with the woman in question.

Let us also consider the possibility that the addressee is plural. This notion is supported by the observation that, although he is evidently on very familiar terms he uses "you" throughout as opposed to "thou". It is true that he does not say "hold your *tongues*" (plural) but this does not necessarily imply that he is only in the company of one other, merely that he is interrupting an objection being voiced by a single member of the party at that moment. The list of imperatives in the first stanza could also imply that the speaker is in the company of several others. Accordingly, if one were directing such a scene for a theatre production, it would be effective to address the various sardonic suggestions—"Take you a course, get you a place, / Observe his honour, or his Grace" (5-6) and so forth—to different members of the supporting cast. Such an interpretation, moreover, lends the poem an air of bar-room banter that seems fitting; one can easily imagine this scene being set in one of the many taverns in the vicinity of the Inns of Court, for example.

The poem also implies in its opening lines that the speaker is a man who is neither particularly young, hence "My five grey haire" (3), nor who enjoys particularly good health, hence "chide my palsie, or my gout" (2), who has immoderate habits (gout is often associated with over-indulgence in alcohol) and is imprudent with money. Indeed, the reference to a "ruin'd fortune" (3) gives further background information, as the reader must assume that the speaker did in fact have a fortune once, and as he is obviously no shrewd businessman that he is a gentleman whose former wealth had been inherited. The invitation to "chide" (2) and "flout" (3) shows, as Smith has observed, the speaker "ironically anticipat[ing] worldly wise objections to an imprudent love, such as that he is too old to fling away his material prospects for an amorous whim" (1971 360). This passage also helps the readers visualise the speaker through what amounts to a vivid character description that is accomplished without resorting to narrative intervention.

The second stanza shifts into the diacritical mode familiar to readers of Donne's love poetry, or, at least, something close to it. The stanza opposes the lovers with a supporting "cast of thousands", much as in "The Sunne Rising". Indeed, such a gesture begins in the first stanza, as we get the impression that the speaker is being rather

dismissive of the prospect of keeping company with the likes of lords, bishops, or even the king himself (6-7). Yet in "The Canonization" the speaker's tone is not so haughty or arrogant; he does not, at this point in the poem, explicitly claim superior or arcane status for his love. The distancing of the lovers from the world of merchant seafarers, farmers, plague victims, soldiers, lawyers, and plaintiffs is achieved rhetorically, and somewhat comedically, through a hyperbolic attempt at persuasion incorporating a blend of ethos and pathos. The stanza can be considered an example of dramatic irony, for the question "who's injur'd by my love?" (10) might well invite the answer "only you, my foolish friend". The poem makes another shift in the third stanza to a conceit equating the two lovers with the phoenix, a conventional hermaphrodite symbol of love as a union. But if the tone seems to become more stately, more Platonic, then it is at the same time tempered by the bawdy connotation that is temptingly present in "Wee dye and rise the same" (26) although, as Smith observes, this line can also be understood as a claim of the lovers' indifference to both sex and death (1971 361).

As "The good-morrow" demonstrates, Donne likes to draw together as many disparate references as possible in his imagery. While on the one hand this is a flourish of bravado as the poet shows off his repertoire, on the other, as I have suggested, any appearance of a chaotic coalition of elements is deceptive. Donne shifts from one figurative frame to the next in a manner that at least appears progressive and logical. His excursions through various suggested courses of action in stanza one and various professions in stanza two of "The Canonization" are examples of this kind of linking. Between the stanzas, too, can be seen a progression where the initial attack, similar in tone to the beginning of *Satire I*, merges into a tentative diacritical conceit in the second stanza. The third is governed by imagery dependent upon the commonplace of love's union and the lovers' loss of individual subjectivity, which in turn gives way in the fourth and fifth to an eternising conceit (rare in Donne) incorporating in one figure both *theatrum mundi* in the form of the microcosm/macrocosm motif and extramission theory: "Who did the whole worlds soule [extract], and drove / Into the glasses of your eyes" (40-1). I prefer the MSS reading given here (whereas Patrides opts for "contract") because, as Smith observes, "extract" adds, "an alchemical image of extraction and distillation in glass vessels" (1971 362). The allusion to alchemy also shows how Donne is able so economically to imbed what I shall call the "content imagery" of individual stanzas within the "structural imagery" according to which the stanzas themselves are organised. The important thing is to be aware that Donne manipulates these disparate materials in a way that is dizzying in its dramatic variety yet organically unified. The content imagery flows from one figure to another like the scenes within an act of a play, while the stanzas are organised like acts (in this case five) that make up the play in its entirety. The organisation of material on the stanzaic level connotes a more controlled progression like the unfolding of a story or logical

argument. That is not to say, however, that it cannot show a considerable shift from beginning to end. Take, for example, the difference in tone between stanzas one and five of “The Canonization”. Certainly, such a shift can be partially accommodated by the observation that the closing stanza comprises reported speech attributed by the poem’s principal player to a hypothetical voice of posterity. This device lends the text a playscript-like quality as it introduces, hypothetically at least, a second speaker. Ultimately, though, these utterances remain part of the speaker’s hyperbole. The closing couplet’s reference to “Countries, Townes, Courts” (44) echoes to some extent the rhetoric of the opening stanza, but it remains a valid criticism of “The Canonization” that it lacks that satisfying sense of circularity with which “perfect” poems are often thought to finish. Donne’s dramatic economy transports us to other worlds with breathtaking facility but, arguably, it fails in this case to bring us back again. But this is no fault if we consider that the poem is primarily about a miraculous transformation that is ultimately ratified by those who cannot initially appreciate it.

Donne’s predominant figure, or master trope, according to the above reading, is diacritical, and this explains why the poem has been called (although not necessarily by Donne) “The Canonization”, in accord with the closing clause of the fourth stanza: “all shall approve / Us *Canoniz’d* for Love” (35-6). The lovers, martyrs in their own time because their contemporaries consider their match disastrous, will be deemed saints by posterity. The generations that follow will know of this exemplary relationship not through the history books or through austere public monuments, but through verse (30). This conceit is metadramatic insofar as its theme, writing poetry, is identical with the practice from which it emanates. In other words, it is metadramatic (and the term is therefore more appropriate than “metapoetic”) precisely because it both enacts its own process and is set in such a way that the appreciative audience will applaud it for doing so. Phenomenologically, it lends a transcendental dimensionality to the piece, providing a moment in which readers may sense the “reflected” presence of the artist as observed by Howard D. Pearce in his phenomenological view of *theatrum mundi*, which I outlined earlier.

The fourth stanza of “The Canonization” contains, as part of Donne’s metadramatic, diacritical eternising conceit, what I consider to be one of his finest lines. “We’ll build in sonnets pretty roomes” (32) stands resplendent and autonomous in its domestic, and therefore private, simplicity, in contrast with the austere public monuments suggested by “half-acre tombes” (34). Syntactically, moreover, it is one of the few lines that comprises a self-contained clause, despite the fact that grammatically it is subordinated by a larger structure as consequent of a conditional. It is another example of Donne’s propensity for economically invoking images of brightly-lit interior spaces (for a dingy or darkened room could hardly be thought of as “pretty”) such as are implied in “The Sunne Rising” and “The good-morrow”. This recurring image is at

its most metadramatic, however, in “The Canonization” by dint of an implied pun on the word “room”, for which the Italian is “stanza”. It is clear then that the poet has in mind an architectural model for the construction of poetic form similar to the metadramatic poetics of theatrical space and playhouse architecture. If stanzas are the “pretty rooms” built into sonnets, then the poems themselves are the edifices constructed to contain them, just as the playhouse contains the myriad scenes and settings conjured up on the stage, while its walls and the centralised focus of the audience’s gaze effectively shuts it off from the outside world. The simile that likens such a structure to a “well wrought urne” is, of course, another of Donne’s most celebrated phrases, borrowed famously by Cleanth Brooks as the title of his influential 1947 treatise on the theory and practice of the New Criticism. Like the “pretty roomes” image, however, this simple noun phrase seems to have been destined for the same kind of immortality that is its very theme.

The figurative structure of “A Valediction forbidding mourning” consists essentially of two extended, or epic, similes. The first of these comprises the first two stanzas and initiates the logical argument or train of thought up to the end of the sixth stanza. The second, the famous “stiffe twin compasses” (26) conceit, accounts for the final three stanzas. These figures, as well as organising the poem’s thematic material and contributing to its rhetorical thrust, lend the poem a dramatic quality that it arguably lacks in other respects.

The first of the similes provides a sense of setting and characterisation in the form of a dramatic tableau which functions as a dynamic, imagistic overture to an generally non-dramatic poem.

As virtuous men passe mildly away,  
And whisper to their soules, to goe,  
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,  
The breath goes now, and some say, no:

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,  
T’were prophanation of our joyes  
To tell the layetie our love. (1-8)

The opening stanza, the vehicle of the simile, succinctly portrays a miniature dramatisation complete with a central character, the “virtuous” man on his deathbed, and a supporting cast of “sad friends” attending his final moments. What is striking about this scene is the economy with which it is staged. In four lines devoid of visual imagery, Donne presents a vignette that is both vivid and dynamic despite being general and non-specific. This effect is achieved largely through the use of common verbs, adverbs, and implied dialogue; what little there is in the way of descriptive language (nouns and adjectives) is given over to induction of character (“virtuous men”) and

mood (“sad friends”). The verbs in question are all verbs of motion, albeit in the form of dead metaphor (“*passee* mildly away”; “to *goe*”) or verbs denoting verbal action (“whisper”; “say”). These verbs are nonetheless sufficiently dynamic to give the non-specific and hypothetical scene, indicated by the plurality of the noun phrase “virtuous men”, a visually evocative quality. The reader is thus led easily to envisage the scene (logic and convention both dictate that it is an interior) and provide the necessary detail (the bed, the relative positioning of the characters, the lighting, and so forth) that is only implicit in the simple language of the lines. The reported speech of the second couplet is suggestive of a dialogical exchange as the sad onlookers disagree as to whether their unfortunate friend has breathed his last. The stanza exemplifies, moreover, the kind of Ignatian “composition of place” that Martz identifies as a technique borrowed by Donne from the initial, preparative stage of the formal practice of Christian meditation. It is as if the poet wants to activate the readers’ visual imaginations as poetic spectators to compensate for the somewhat dry, lofty middle stanzas of the poem. Principles of the art of dying well, or *ars moriendi*, are also implicated by the notion of “pass[ing] mildly away” adding an inflection of Renaissance piety to the tone of the poem.

The second stanza comprises the tenor of the simile initiated in the first. It also introduces implicit information about the speaker and addressee through the accusative “us” (5). At this stage it remains unclear whether or not the speaker is making a general, narrative statement about dying: “So let us melt, and make no noise” (5) does not necessarily signify a shift from the initial setting or subject matter. It is only when we reach the end of the second stanza that the deictic shifter is contextualised and we become aware that the speaker and addressee are a couple and that the opening stanza is a rhetorical analogy. It is interesting to note that throughout the first person plural pronoun is never used in the nominative case. The diacritical portrayal of the exclusive, unifying love shared by the couple apparently precludes such decisive subjectivity for, as the perfect example of love’s union, they are not required to *do* anything in particular. Consequently, there is an “us”, and the speaker evidently functions individually as an “I” (22, 36), possibly confirming our assumption that he is male, an active subject who “must go” (22), but he never says “we”. The other notable feature of the second stanza is that the verb “melt” seems out of place in that one could be forgiven for accusing Donne of having introduced an implicit mixed metaphor. Certainly, there is a certain associative parallelism between “melt” and “teare-floods”, “no noise” and “sigh tempests” (5-6), but “melt” nonetheless seems incongruous with both the tenor and the vehicle of the extended simile. This is possibly evidence, then, of what Carey considers Donne’s fixation (one of many) with liquefaction, according to which “the idea of melting irresistibly attracted him” (175). A significant feature of the choice of the verb, however, is that it implies the possibility of transformation from one state to another without irreparable loss of identity. Ice and water are both the same substance

after all, despite their differing, and ever-reversible, states. The choice of verb therefore prepares the reader for the lofty notion proclaimed a few lines on: that certain changes of state (we do not learn for certain that he is talking about parting until the reference to “absence” [15] in the fourth stanza) cannot effect the essence of their love, whereas it is vulnerable to contamination or perhaps destruction if it is made known to the “layetie” (8), implying by contrast that the speaker and addressee are adepts who, to paraphrase “The Exstasie” are so refined by love that they understand the language of the soul. Donne’s choice of using the verb “to tell” transitively, making “our love” (8) a contiguous direct object unmediated by distancing prepositional elements such as “of” or “about”, lends it a factitive quality that emphasises the idea that to tell something is to do something to it, thus effecting real change and not just altering its state.

The middle section of “A Valediction forbidding mourning” is elevated and neoplatonic in tone. This gives the poem its stately, formal feel, only equalled in “A nocturnall upon S. *Lucies* day” among the more celebrated of the *Songs and Sonets*. The principle focus of this section is to emphasise the notion of the exclusiveness of the lovers, whose sentiments are diacritically opposed, we are asked to believe, to the unrefined somatic experience of the “layetie”, those “[d]ull sublunary lovers” (13). The proposition is that the speaker and his beloved, like the lovers depicted in “The Exstasie”, are initiates in “love’s language” or “dialogue of one”. But apart from the fact that the speaker is soon to be parted from his beloved and has lofty ideals, there is little implicature in this relatively staid, non-dramatic section. A certain dynamic tension is nonetheless inherent in the diacritical stance, which draws on an assumed hierarchy that privileges the neoplatonic ideal of love-as-union over the more gushing, superficial “tear-floods” and “sigh-tempests” (6) typical of the Petrarchan complaint. Metadramatically, then, this functions as a comment not only upon the behaviour of lovers but also upon the poetics of love. The explicitly climatic, and hence geographical and spatial, references in these figures are complemented by an implicit architectural reference in the etymology of “prophanation”, which literally means “placing outside the temple” (7), which, we are to assume, is an appropriate location for the uninitiated laity who are not privy to the dramatic reality of forbidden knowledge. The poem’s spatiality is continued as it incorporates wider creation into the “fane”, so to speak, which is the rightful dwelling of the priestly lovers, and the famous compass conceit discussed below also has architectural connotations as its vehicle is an instrument used for designing buildings.

The second extended simile, apart from being probably the most quoted exemplar of the metaphysical conceit, demonstrates the dramatic quality inherent in such notoriously tenuous figures. As with the opening deathbed simile the implicitly dramatic dynamics of the closing figure are evident in its reliance upon simple verbs of motion, germane to the theme of two lovers separated by the compulsion for one of them to

travel (“move”, “rome”, “leanes”, “growes”, “comes”, “runne”). The figure of the “stiff twin compasses” (26) is also notable for its indeterminacy. It remains uncertain as to what aspect of the compass’s physical dynamics is prevalent in the conceit. “It leans, and hearkens after it, / And grows erect, as that comes home” (31-2) seems to be referring to the linear movement of the two arms of the compass, the “feet” of which can either be drawn apart or closed together, while the basic unity of the instrument is maintained at the other end where the two sections remain joined. This meaning has more to do with the mechanical construction of the device rather than its function. “Thy firmnes makes my circle just, / And makes me end where I begunne” (35-6), however, clearly depicts the functional aspect of the compass, namely the drawing of circles. This sense is the more satisfying, given that the circle symbolises perfection, eternity, and, in this instance, homecoming. Appropriately, Donne selects this image for the poem’s final (perfect) cadence. Yet the conflation of the two dynamic aspects of the compass contained in the final two stanzas respectively can be considered a flaw or over-complication of the figure (see Redpath 85-6 for a discussion of the conundrum). Indeed, the notion that the most famous of all metaphysical conceits contains so obvious an *aporia* must be appealing to armchair deconstructionists everywhere, especially those who consider Donne over-rated. Yet I believe that the inclusion of both types of movement in the image makes it all the richer. I have already suggested that the separating of the feet is an aspect of mechanical propensity, whereas the drawing of a circle is the intended applied function of the device. The former is therefore a preparation for the latter. By conflating the two aspects Donne implies, in true Renaissance spirit, that the physical separation of lovers, although tantamount to a kind of death, is a necessary and desirable precondition for joyous reunion. The fact that the magpie poet uses both aspects of the dynamic nature of compasses to construct this image, even at the risk of making it almost incoherent, justifies Patrides’s claim that the metaphysical conceit is the definitive example of “theatrical language” in terms of Eliot’s notion of “the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the farthest stage [and I wonder if Patrides inferred a theatrical pun from Eliot’s turn of phrase] to which ingenuity can carry it”. Thus viewed, the celebrated conceit demonstrates that writing is to be considered dramatic when, perhaps above all other considerations, it can be seen to take risks, even to the point of embracing the danger of collapsing into meaninglessness.

“Twickenham garden” differs from many of the other poems I have discussed so far in that it clearly invokes images of an exterior rather than interior space or setting. Like the *Holy Sonnet* which begins “This is my playes last scene”, its dramaticity lies in its soliloquy-like quality, its propensity for self-disclosure and psychological introspection. There is no persistent second person addressee and one gets the feeling that the speaker is playing, as it were, to the stalls as he portrays himself as both lover



and villain. The absent party whom he mentions in the third person only materialises to any extent in the penultimate line (“none is true but shee”), with other references to “she” general and hypothetical. Such deictic indeterminacy does nothing to assist in resolving speculation as to whether or not this poem is addressed to Donne’s patroness and friend, Lucy Countess of Bedford, who resided at Twickenham Park between 1607 and 1618.

The poem is animated by common verbs of motion, sometimes augmented by indexical markers: “Hither I come” (2), “I do bring / The spider love” (5-6), “this place” (8, 11, 16), “I have the serpent brought” (9), “Hither with christall vyals, lovers come, / And take my teares” (19-20). The effect is a disturbed, agitated sense of motion that undermines the notion of the garden as a paradise, appropriately so given the fact that it is infected by the presence of evil in the form of a “spider” (6) and a “serpent” (9), symbols of poison and temptation or persuasion respectively. The poem’s use of language is also dynamic in a factitive or metamorphic sense, as exemplified in “transubstantiates” (6) and “Make me a mandrake, so I may grow [‘groane’ MSS] here, / Or a stone fountaine weeping out my yeare” (17-18).

What of implicature, Donne’s most consistently present dramatic ingredient, in “Twicknam garden”? The presence of “sighs” and “tears” in the opening line is a sure indication that the general tenor of the poem is Petrarchan, that the speaker is an unrequited lover who at once suffers and feeds upon that suffering. Nothing in the poem suggests otherwise, and there are no cynical turns (although the poem is not lacking in cynicism); in this respect it is one of Donne’s more genuinely Petrarchan poems rather than a witty parody of that style. The lady is cruel in her rejection of the speaker but worthy in her fidelity to her husband. The speaker has come, moreover, out of love for her, a “spider love” that he realises can only be a poison to the idyllic setting should his attempts to woo her prove successful. Similarly, the reference to the “serpent” he has brought with him suggests that his only hope of success, like that of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, is duplicitous persuasion. This in turn implies her non-availability, strongly suggesting that the beloved is a married woman, and that implication is verified in the closing line’s reference to “her truth” (troth).

As for the physical setting, one imagines that the speaker has arrived in a disturbed, impassioned state in the grounds of the country house. But there is absolutely no mention of the house itself and the garden lacks descriptive attributives apart from a passing reference to “These trees” (13). This is as much detail as the reader is given. The inferred setting, then, is largely a quasi-allegorical, psychological manifestation engendered by the the speaker’s mental state (“Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares”). The speaker comes to the garden seeking spring; we may conclude, then, that he has been experiencing the psychological equivalent of winter (the “winter” of his “discontent”, one might say, and, yes, there is something of

Richard III in this lover-cum-villain persona). Yet he finds no relief here bar the hope of becoming “[s]ome senseless piece of this place” (16). In other words, he aspires towards a synechdochic, microcosmic relation to his surroundings. He would have himself melt into the background like so many of the unfortunate characters in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*.

Two further inferences may be drawn from Donne’s inclusion of a small supporting cast: namely, the hypothetical “lovers” who bring their lachrymatories (“christall vyals” [19]) to the garden. The first is that he has become love’s martyr, as the ancients are believed to have placed tear-vessels in tombs as mourning tributes (Smith 1971 404). The second is that the beloved is the lady of the house and this is supported by the gradual making explicit of certain items after they have been somewhat ambiguously introduced. The lovers in question may be part of a rhetorical invocation on the part of the speaker, but grammatical and referential ambiguity in the third stanza implies the possibility of further characterisation. The verbs “come” (19) and “take” (20) are most likely to be read initially as third person present simple indicative denoting a habitual event. The passage appears to be a narrative description but such a misapprehension is clarified in the following line which is imperative in mood and apostrophised to a second person (plural) addressee: “And try your mistresse Teares at home” (21). To be grammatically consistent, the preceding lines must also now be interpreted as imperative antecedents of this injunction directed at the (now) purely hypothetical lovers. Yet the speaker seems to have a clear idea as to whom he is invoking. It becomes apparent that he is only addressing male lovers, as “your mistresse Teares” must refer to their female counterparts, and such a reading is arguably borne out by “at home” (21) and “Nor can you more judge womans thoughts by teares” (24). “Home” also provides the closest thing in the poem to a contrasting other world providing a context for the deictic references to “this place” (8, 11, 16, ) while suggesting a possibility of withdrawal or return to a constant, safe world, quite different from the indeterminate psychological wasteland in which the speaker finds himself. An additional implicature available here is that his beloved is the lady of the house but that the speaker is surely not the master. Unlike his hypothetical addressees he is unable to try *his* mistress’s tears at home. The invoked lovers and their respective mistresses are therefore parallels to the domestic bliss he imagines is enjoyed by his beloved and the one to whom she is true, presumably her husband. The speaker’s argument, therefore, is not that all women are “false” (22) but only that he knows his own tears are genuine. In other words, he has no actual evidence of her real “thoughts” (24), and the reference to her clothes and “shadow” (25) suggests phenomenological uncertainty in the manner of Plato’s allegory of the cave, thereby tacitly invoking *theatrum mundi*.

Ultimately, “Twicknam garden” is a dramatisation of a failed quest for self-discovery through love. The speaker enacts this drama in the style of a soliloquy in which he acknowledges both his failure and his accountability with the auto-vocative exclamation “O, selfe traytor” (5). One is reminded of the Delphic motto “Know thyself”, borrowed by Ovid in his version of the Narcissus myth in *Metamorphoses*. Like Narcissus, the speaker seeks self knowledge through love but, ironically, cannot love because he does not know himself (in the case of Ovid’s Narcissus the lover mistakes his own image for that of the beloved) and his demise is the result of his realising that error, which, in the terms of tragedy, can be considered his *hamartia* or fatal flaw. Similarly, Donne’s speaker finds that he “may not this disgrace / Indure, nor yet leave loving” (14-15) and such a declaration in the very middle of the poem marks the equivalent of a dramatic catastrophe (while also hinting, alternatively, at the conventional persuasion poem with death as a rhetorical feint). He is doomed because he cannot know himself through his beloved, for her “truth” is not his to know. The final phrase “her truth kills mee” (27) therefore reads like a stage direction (“*Dies*”, for example at the end of a tragedy). From an audience point-of-view the protagonist’s demise is imminent and inevitable; its statement in the present tense is a formal requirement marking the piece’s denouement and final resolution. In terms of poetic convention it also provides an ending that is sufficiently Petrarchan in tone, thus providing, in conjunction with the poem’s opening, a generically defined frame of reference for the soliloquy.

The speaker of “The Dreame” utilises the principle of withdrawal and return in an enactment of a tantalising situation. In the closing couplet of the first stanza he implores his mistress, “Enter these armes, for since thou thoughtst it best, / Not to dreame all my dreame, let’s act the rest” (10). The verb “act” has obvious bawdy connotations, but in a meta-narrative or metadramatic sense it indicates discursively that what follows is an account of what has gone on before. The speaker has been asleep and dreaming of his mistress, the addressee. In his dream he is making love with her when she, the real mistress, awakens him. He is overjoyed and believes he is about to experience in reality the pleasure he was about to conclude in the dream. But she breaks away from him, leaving him frustrated with no other hope for gratification than to return to his dream of her. The line can also mean “let’s pretend to be asleep (in the manner of the ‘rest’ that I have just been enjoying)”, which reinforces the suggestion that the speaker would like to progress to the satisfaction promised in his dream. Conventional punning on the verb “to come” (21, 29) also serves to highlight the speaker’s unfulfilled preoccupation.

The close of the poem, with its familiar pun on the word “die”, carries the force of a complaint and as such is something of a Petrarchan commonplace which has been updated and rendered more bawdy by the phallic insinuation of “torches which must

ready bee" (27). Indeed, there is much of the *carpe diem* tradition in this poem. Gardner numbers it amongst the *Songs and Sonets* she considers "persuasions . . . to yield or arguments against honour" and, like "The Flea", she regards it as a "fully dramatized monologue" (1965 liii). Redpath classes it amongst what he considers the more positive "[c]ourting poems" (xxvi).

Donne likes to play with and often to blur the boundaries between the real, waking world and the dream world, and dreams make, as discussed in Chapter Seven, a perfect vehicle for withdrawal and return. When the speaker refers to "this happy dreame" (2), the use of the proximate demonstrative "this" leaves the reader slightly uncertain as to whether he is in or out of the dream state. That he has woken becomes clear through the use of the past tense in the line that follows: "It was a theame" (3). But the notion remains, flattering to the addressee, that her presence imbues the waking world with a dream-like quality, and this implication is neatly inverted in the suggestion that thoughts of her "make dreames truths" (8). Indeed, the demonstrative "this" in the second line is pivotal in a metadramatic sense as it demonstrates a self-conscious awareness that even the waking world staged in the poem is in fact no more than a "phantasie" (4).

In terms of genre, "The Dreame" is a dramatic lyric as it is addressed to a specific mistress. In fact, the play between the "real" addressee and her dream image assists in the dramatic characterisation of a coy, tantalising lover; her dream counterpart makes her seem all the more real, and the speaker's disappointed speculation that "Thou art not thou" (23) all the more amusing, following as it does the comically elevated confession that it would be "[p]rophane, to thinke thee any thing but thee" (20). "Thou art not thou" also strongly echoes God's definition of himself when, in Exodus 3.14-15, he says to Moses "I am that I am", providing further reference to the divine, which, in turn, is compounded by the phrase "all spirit, pure" (25). The speaker thus compliments the addressee, almost to a point of deification, in an attempt to woo her into bed, while at the same time negating her ("Thou art *not* thou"). "Let's act the rest" bears the force of an invitation emanating from the same seductive intent and a similar sense of negation or absence. Metadramatically, it also comments upon what is not mentioned. In terms of pragmatics, however, interpretation of "the rest" is purely a matter of implicature, and the speaker knows the addressee knows what he is talking about, just as the poet knows that the reader will also understand.

"Loves Alchymie" is considered by Gardner to be one of a group of poems that depends upon and rejects the concept of "mutual love" celebrated by other offerings among the *Songs and Sonets* (1965 liii). She also argues that "Loves Alchymie" is one of four "bitter palinodes, rejecting the idea that there is 'some Deitie in love' [as expressed in "Farewell to Love"]" (liii), according to which sub-genre the poetic utterance bears the force of a retraction or recantation of a view expressed in an earlier

poem. The poem cannot be considered a true dramatic lyric as it does not have a second person addressee, but its theme of love as an empty show hints at an underlying awareness of *theatrum mundi* that comes to the surface at least once through the ambiguity of the word “play” (17).

Redpath also feels that “Loves Alchymie” is one of the more negative of the *Songs and Sonets*, noting that “hostility is expressed in general terms, not as hostility towards some particular person or relationship” (xxiv). The poem is a sceptical dig at the claims of high-minded lovers and the central metaphor of alchemy lends itself perfectly to the exasperated exclamation “Oh, ’tis imposture all” (6), save that Donne’s speaker is thinking of “love’s Myne” (2) and laments the fact not that he finds women to be without minds but that he cannot find any trace in them of the secret that inspires his love. In other words, masculine love is not reciprocated, thereby making the concept of mutual love between the sexes nothing more than an empty charade (“Aire and Angels” presents a very similar argument). The notion of elevated, diacritical love as expressed in poems such as “The Sunne Rising” or “The Extasie” is demolished by the realisation that the speaker’s servant can enjoy as much happiness in love as may his master “[i]f he can / Endure the short scorne of a Bridegroom’s play?” (17). The line is tantamount to an inversion of the notion of “[d]ull sublunary lovers love” in “A Valediction forbidding mourning”(13), with the haughty sentiment of that poem almost parodied here. The theatrical allusion attendant to the word “play”, in addition to its bawdy connotation, underscores the idea of the imposture of love while also emphasising the notion of its brevity. The humiliating aspect of a meaningless ceremony is also echoed in the image of “that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey” (21), invoking the disharmony and amateurism that one might expect in the desultory performance of songs to celebrate an unremarkable union.

The secondary metaphor of “mummy”, an elixir extracted from corpses, continues the theme of alchemy on a somatic level. The idea of women as “body without mind . . . mere lumps of dead flesh” (Redpath 63) can be considered evidence of Donne’s tendency to misogyny. Redpath’s comments on medieval physicians prescribing Egyptian mummies’ flesh and the trade surrounding such a practice (63) allow for the consideration that the speaker is suggesting something along the lines of “women are but lumps of dead meat that can make us men feel better and we should trade or circulate them freely between us”. Rather than evidence of the speaker’s, or the poet’s, misogyny, or, perhaps, in spite of it, such a consideration allows for the possibility that the poem also serves to advocate men’s inconstancy.

The image of the fool has definite dramatic or theatrical connotations in addition to its non-theatrical (but nonetheless similar) ones, and Donne’s poetry contains no less than twenty-one references to fools. His fondness for fool imagery is particularly apparent in “The triple Fool”: “I am two fooles” (1); “And I, which was two fooles, do

so grow three; / Who are a little wise, the best fooles bee.” (21-2). Gardner classes this as a poem of unrequited love, “‘Petrarchan’ though far from Petrarch” (1965 liv).

Redpath, however, suggests that “hostility is directed towards some particular woman or relationship” (xxiv), in which “[t]he poet is trebly a fool because (1) he loves, (2) he expresses his love in verse, (3) he thereby enables someone to set the verse to music and by singing it to re-awaken the passion which poetical composition had lulled to sleep” (21). While one is naturally tempted in reading poems that dramatise the act of writing poetry to identify the poet with the speaker, as has Redpath (who claims to be paraphrasing comments he attributes to Grierson), it would be rash to consider the poem in any specific way autobiographical, either as a lover’s complaint or as a lament to the folly of composing “whining Poëtry” (3). After all, the poem depicts a fractured and fracturing subject, as is indicated by “two fooles, do so grow three”.

The beloved is never mentioned in “The Triple Fool”, let alone addressed, other than pronominally in the hypothetical “If she would not deny” (5). Indeed, the only characters in the poem other than the speaker are the hypothetical “wiseman” (4) and “[s]ome man” (13) who will set his verse to music. The “wiseman” is an antagonist to the initial fool, the lover, while the musician is an antagonist to the secondary fool, the poet. The dynamics of the poem can therefore be seen to operate within a double field of triangulation. First, the speaker is a tripartite subject of lover, poet, and popular lyricist. In the absence of the beloved, who is the alter-ego of the lover, this composite character can only act out his drama with the alter-egos of the poet (the wise man) and the lyricist (the musician) respectively. The deferral of identifying an autonomous subject or addressee makes the poem a critique of the repeatability, or iterability, of poetic formulae, thereby undermining its quasi-Petrarchan tone. Indeed, the joke is on the Petrarchan lover (thus having the effect of distancing the speaker from the inferred author) whose “triumphs so are published” (20). Such practice is futile and indulgent, the poem suggests, because it is through publication or circulation that his sorrow, embodied in his poetry, will inevitably come back to haunt him.

*Satyre I* (“Away thou fondling motley humorist”) is another poem rich in fool imagery, much of which is concerned with costume and disguise. The addressee is depicted vividly yet remains ambiguous: the “humourist” could be either an actor or a writer and, as Smith has noted, “[h]e may be an aspect of the poet’s own nature, the active man of the world in him as against the retired contemplative man his profession makes him” (1971 469). “Fondling” suggests that he is foolishly optimistic, credulous, or naive, while “motley” connotes an incongruous mixture or varied character in accord with the literal meaning of a jester’s parti-coloured costume. Smith’s suggestion, in accord with those of other commentators, that the poem enacts an inner struggle between two opposing aspects of the speaker’s character is both appealing and compelling, given that Donne stages a similar struggle between licentious inconstancy

and the contemplative life in the *Holy Sonnet* which begins “Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one”.

*Satyre I* uses for its physical setting the distinction between interior and exterior spaces. The initial interior setting, the speaker’s study, his “standing wooden chest” (2) is depicted with claustrophobic irony as a prison or coffin (4) in which he would self-righteously confine himself in order to learn precisely nothing from the great men whose works surround him.<sup>17</sup> As a theatre-of-the-mind transcending time and space with its cast of luminaries from the history of ideas, the speaker’s “woodden chest” is also reminiscent of the collusive, universal potential for open representation or referential indeterminacy implicit in the apologetic and metadramatic invocation of the “wooden O” by the Prologue in *Henry V* (13). The notion that the speaker is to some degree self-satirising is borne out in part by the choice of words such as “[c]onsorted” (3) and by the contradiction inherent in the idea of “[g]iddie fantastique Poëts of each land” qualifying as “constant company” (9-10). The study, then, is the theatre of the speaker’s own vanity, or at least of his naive piety. The exterior world of London’s streets, on the other hand, represents everything that he holds in haughty disdain. It is the mannered world of the would-be social climber, a world of vice, show and foppishness in the form of perfume, silk, gold, feathers, hose, hats, ruffs, suits. Given that all these camp, theatrical features are qualities of the exterior world, the poem presents something of an inversion of the dynamics of theatrical space. The implication is that perhaps the speaker’s interior world, symbolised by his study, is more stagy and affected than he realises.

The poem’s addressee, meanwhile, is a somewhat Falstaffian figure. He is the Vice, the clown-tempter, the subversive element who would distract the princely subject from the development of necessary qualities. He also embodies the inner-struggle between duty and debauchery, conscience and corruption. The speaker is led astray by the addressee, the action sign-posted by lines that function like stage directions embedded in dialogue: “I shut my chamber doore” (52) and “Now we are in the street” (67). The poem’s theatrical tone is sustained by lines such as “Every fine silken painted foole we meet” (72) and “Our dull Comedians want him” (99).

Despite the theatricality with which the fool and those he admires are depicted, however, they are mere foils to the real drama of *Satyre I*. As I have already suggested, the dramatic action of the poem centres around a psychological struggle acted out within the speaker, the scholarly figure whose unenviable task is to find a practical equilibrium between Christian charity and hatred of the sin if not of the sinner. M. Thomas Hester

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<sup>17</sup> What he hopes to learn is *ars moriendi*, the secret of dying well (see Beaty, *The Craft of Dying*), a subject taken most seriously in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and perhaps especially by someone of Donne’s temperament, as accounts of his own death confirm.

points out that “[r]ather than satirizing the inadequacy of the speaker, the poem dramatizes the introductory nature of his experiences, his initial realization of the necessity as well as the limitation of satire” (17). Hester thereby identifies a metadramatic feature of the poem, which functions as a self-conscious spokesperson justifying its own role within the series of five satires, and of the genre of Christian satire generally. He argues that the poem “examines . . . the relationship between Christian satire and Christian scholarship—through a dramatic portrait of a scholar who discovers both the problematic character and the moral synonymy of his private and public commitments of Christian charity” (19). In this respect, Hester concludes, “the speaker’s nearly exclusive reliance on the recitation of scholastic ideals in his attempt to reform the fop shows that he is not yet Donne’s most effective or mature satiric spokesman” (31). *Satyre I* is, for Hester, “a comic study in failure that delineates between the good intentions of the satirist as *vir bonus* and the *adversarius* as obdurate fool” (32). Hester’s critique of the poem is itself notable for its use of theatrical terminology. He comments, for example, upon the “*dramatic* view of the fop’s providential punishment” (32, Hester’s emphasis). He also identifies “the various *roles* he [the speaker] assumes in dealing with the ‘humorist’” (21, my emphasis): namely the roles of spouse, priest, shepherd, preacher and prophet. In addition to these roles played by the speaker, Hester is aware of the metadramatic significance of imagery incorporating “clothing, adultery, imprisonment, and animals” (23):

Donne’s scholar envisions luxurious apparel, then, as a proud flaunting of the very sign of a man’s sin and as an adulterous cupidity which disregards the divine order at work in the world, a view substantiated by his depiction of man’s natural and unnatural imprisonments in the world. (24)

Animal imagery invokes for Hester the book-of-creatures topos, which I discussed earlier as an emblematic correlative of *theatrum mundi*.

The . . . popular emblem books of the age reiterate this interpretation [that of the “sermons” of Physiologus] of God’s Book of Nature by illustrating how animals embody certain vices or virtues that man should avoid or emulate. In *Satyre I*, the animals to which the scholar compares the fool identify the precise virtues that the fool lacks. (27).

Finally, Hester also draws our attention to the fact that

[t]he second half of the poem, . . . which takes place in the street, is fraught with rapid and unexpected shifts in time. As Hughes points out, “time sequences overlap one another in dizzying succession” as the fop is viewed first in the present tense, then in the past tense, and then in the future, before being telescoped into a simultaneous consideration from multiple points of temporal view (104-12). In the last nine lines “past, present, and future are telescoped together . . . , capping the excursion into the complexities of time. What is real



past, or where is real present, what persists becomes an emblem for the conflict of roles within the poem." Ignorant of, or indifferent to, the providential patterning of human time, the fop creates his own context of chaos, emblematic of his own sinfulness [*sic*] purposelessness. Throughout these shifts, the scholar is always described as being in the present, while the fool is, in a sense, manipulated by time or at its mercy. (29)

One of Hester's conclusions is that "the scholar controls time in the poem while the fop and his townsmen are controlled by it" (29). The scholar, then, is like a director of a drama, specifically of a motion picture. The temporal disjunctions observed by Hester and the juxtaposition of interior and exterior settings lend the piece a cinematic quality that is similar to the montage technique that Albrecht sees at work in the *Holy Sonnets*. Together with its thematic preoccupation with costume, these features are likely to make the piece appear dramatic, especially, perhaps, to modern readers.

"Elegie [XVI]. On his Mistris" boasts a number of essentially dramatic features, including theatrical allusion, disguise, withdrawal into a dream world, and implied dialogue. Yet this poem does not strike me as being intrinsically dramatic in the manner of, for example, many of the *Songs and Sonets*. This is because the reader is not required to infer to the same degree, and as a result the poem, like the *Elegies* in general, lacks the same sense of immediacy and presence of the stronger of the dramatic lyrics. Certainly, "On his Mistris" is an "I-thou" poem with the speaker directly addressing his beloved in the second person. Yet it has more of the quality of a narrative; more is told the reader, and the overall effect is theatrical rather than dramatic (to cite Porter's distinction, discussed earlier) in the sense of a scene being played out in the reading of the poem uninterrupted by an intrusive narrator. The speaker is in fact addressing a hypothetical dramatic situation involving the subterfuge of disguise, as his mistress, it is implied, has proposed that she travel with him as his "faign'd Page" (14). This is one of those occasions in which, as in some of the sermons, Donne uses theatrical imagery to rail against duplicity and pretence. Hence, "the rightest company / Of Players, which upon the worlds stage be" (35-6) would, the speaker alleges, immediately see through such a disguise, dressing up as other people being their profession. The overt allusion to *theatrum mundi*, moreover, compounds the notion that the whole of humanity is sufficiently adept at the art of duplicity and concealment to spot the feigned page's subterfuge, thus putting her in danger. Significantly, then, the speaker implores the addressee, "Be my true mistress still, not my faign'd Page" (14). The options are presented as a polarised choice and there appears to be no doubt in the speaker's mind that the roles are not compatible with one another. The situations invoked are dramatic, but it does not seem as though the speaker is actually living them in the moment of the utterance, but rather that he is using them as rhetorical illustrations to persuade the addressee that it is better for their love, and for her honour, that she does accompany him abroad.

As I have indicated, "On his Mistris" depicts a scene that is dramatic in that it is full of images of subterfuge and conflicting motives equal to the dramatic conflict to be found in a play, and this is reflected in terms of imagery and vocabulary: "which spies and rivals threatned me" (6), "thy fathers wrath" (7). The poem also makes significant use of speech acts to govern its dynamics at the expense of both setting and character. Such an assertion may be borne out through the observation of a composed, epistolary quality; the poem has the feel of something the speaker wants to say, rather than words uttered in the heat of the moment. It is as though, as Fish argues of certain moments in Donne, the speaker/protagonist is subsumed by his own "words masculine perswasive force" (4). The poem draws on the illocutionary force of a specific speech act, namely the swearing of solemn oaths, to illustrate the speaker's concern for following the correct code of behaviour in the context of the situation in which he and his beloved are placed. Because the speaker is concerned with the idea that true love can be undermined through dissembling, he plays on the notion of what I shall call the "negative speech act": the idea that the linguistic formulae by which an oath is sworn or a promise made can be just as readily utilised in the breaking of vows. In this respect what is technically infelicitous in one sense becomes felicitous in another insofar as a violated or distorted promise, for example, can itself rightly be considered an action. Donne explores a similar concept in "Woman's constancy" and both poems are wilfully dismissive of the idea that speech acts are socially ratified by contexts extending beyond the speaker and addressee. Take, for example, the opening passage of "On his Mistris":

By our first and fatall interview,  
 By all desires which thereof did ensue,  
 By our long starving hopes, by that remorse  
 Which my words masculine perswasive force  
 Begot in thee, and by the memory  
 Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatned me,  
 I calmly beg. But by thy father's wrath,  
 By all paines, which want and divorcement hath,  
 I conjure thee; and all the oathes which I  
 And thou have sworne to seae joynt constancy,  
 Here I unsweare, and oversweare them thus,  
 Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous. (1-12)

This passage comprises four explicit performatives: begging, conjuring (in the sense of appealing solemnly to someone), unswearing, and overswearing. The first two are conventional enough but the latter two seem dubious, inherently infelicitous, one might say. What, after all, would be the point of swearing an oath if it were so simple and acceptable a practice merely to "unswear" or "overswear" it at one's will? If the speaker is so ready to nullify his vows perhaps the mistress should be concerned as to the real reasons why he is not keen on the idea of her accompanying him in the first place. The idea of negating performative utterances is an interesting one as it at once acknowledges

and undermines the concept of verbal power. Donne similarly addresses the negative capability of his “words masculine perswasive force” in “The Apparition” when his speaker advocates the effectiveness of contextualised silence, or implicature, as a vehicle for his unspoken threats: “What I will say, I will not tell thee now, / Lest that preserve thee” (14-15).

Because the speaker of “On his Mistris” is careful in his rhetoric to follow a conventional formula for the utterance of performatives (“Here I unsweare” effectively follows what has come to be known as the “hereby” criterion) the poem presents a novel technique of induction that I consider truly dramatic in one of the literary senses proposed by Booth, insofar as the information divulged is incidental to the motive of the utterance. It is a fact that one conventionally swears *by* or *on* something: “by Almighty God”, “on my mother’s grave” and so on. Here Donne ingeniously uses this aspect of the performative formula to present a catalogue of events and emotional states that summarise his relationship with the addressee up to the point of the utterance. Overall, the poem is essentially rhetorical rather than dramatic, although unlike Chari I am not arguing that the two modes, rhetorical and dramatic, are essentially incompatible. Indeed, if anything, the poem demonstrates that the two modes are highly compatible, for the rhetorical argument is neatly framed by dramatic passages. Embedded hypothetical speech attributed to the poem’s addressee adds a sense of implied dialogue to the mini-drama invoked in this penultimate passage, along with withdrawal and return in the form of the addressee awakening from a dream (indeed, the process of return is incomplete as she is evidently unaware that she has been dreaming):

nor in bed fright thy Nurse  
With midnights startings, crying out, oh, oh  
Nurse, ô my love is slaine, I saw him goe  
O’er the white Alpes alone; I saw him, I,  
Assail’d, fight, taken, stabb’d, bleed, fall, and die. (49-54)

In addition to providing an amusingly dramatic vignette with which to close the poem, the above passage is, significantly, the last of a series of negative imperatives. These “do nots”, rather than implying an overbearing speaker, are suggestive of a wilful addressee; no mere foil, this mistress clearly presumes the agency to do as she wishes, so much so that the speaker is aware for the need of persuasion rather than censure. This consideration regarding her character also implicitly enhances the idea of the inappropriateness of her being disguised as a servant. Again, speech acts seem to be part of his strategy: along with the threat of the unswearing and overswearing of oaths, one gets the impression that the desired outcome for the speaker is that the addressee

herself will commit herself performatively, by giving her word that she will put aside the notion of following him abroad.

Like "On his Mistris", "Elegie IV. The Perfume", is essentially a narrative requiring little in the way of inferential input on the part of the reader, while nonetheless displaying a number of dramatic features. The poem is highly entertaining, largely because of its supporting cast of comedic foils, two-dimensional caricatures depicted with great economy, usually in just a phrase or two: "thy Hydroptique father" (6), "thy immortall mother which doth lye / Still buried in her bed, yet will not dye" (13-14), "Thy little brethren, which like Faiery Sprights / Oft skipt into our chamber, those sweet nights" (27-8), and, most memorably, "The grim eight-foot-high iron-bound serving-man, / That oft names God in oathes, and onely then" (31-32). This last caricature in particular shows that Donne is not adverse to resorting to absurd, cartoon-like representations when it suits his purpose. In this case that purpose is the portrayal of unassailable resistance to young love, hence the suspicious parents who lack even the consideration to die conveniently so that the speaker may enjoy the uninterrupted company of their daughter. The poem has a farcical, hyperbolic quality, and the improbable dimensions of the staunch man-servant/bodyguard are part of that effect. One can readily imagine the speaker sneaking in and out of doorways narrowly avoiding detection by his colossal nemesis in attempts to meet secretly with his beloved. But though she is the direct addressee of the poetic utterance, she is not really characterised at all, even as a foil. Her presence in the text is strictly pronominal, almost incidental, although "thy suppos'd escapes" (2) does imply that she is wilful and wayward, or at least that she is considered by her parents to be so. One might also infer from the phrase that the speaker is suggesting that he is not her first lover, or, on the contrary, that her parents' suspicions as to her past behaviour are entirely unfounded. The speaker appears less concerned with the truth or falsity of allegations regarding her purported escapades than indignant in the belief that he is being held responsible for them, having been "[o]nce, and but once" caught with her, presumably in a compromising situation. We learn, however, that the lovers have had more than one clandestine meeting, as witnessed by her younger brothers and sisters, who, "kist, and ingled on thy fathers knee, / Were brib'd next day, to tell what they did see" (29-30).

Foreshadowing the spirit of farce, "The Perfume" relies on subterfuge and intrigue to achieve a sense of dramatic momentum. The plot is simple: the young lovers have been meeting secretly in her parent's house and are caught together on one occasion when her father smells the scent the speaker wears, "which betray'd mee to my enemy" (40). It is notable that his perfume, as well as his clothes and footwear are personified: "I taught my silkes, their whistling to forbear, / Even my opprest shoes, dumbe and speechlesse were" (51-2). These touches of sartorial and cosmetic prosopopoeia effectively cast the speaker's attire, features of his public image, as

second-order antagonists in the unfolding drama, as is the case with the “feigned page” disguise in “On his Mistris”. The implied strength of the perfume together with the fact that it is sufficiently distinctive to betray him casts the speaker as a fop whose vanity outweighs his cunning and whose taste leaves something to be desired.

Deictic elements in “The Perfume” prove unstable, as the accusative party shifts from the mistress to the perfume: “Onely, thou, bitter sweet, whom I had laid / Next mee, me traiterously hast betraid” (53-4). In the final section it shifts again and the address becomes an invocation to the Gods (65). This modulation creates a kind of withdrawal effect which culminates in the joke which comprises the closing couplet: “All my perfumes, I give most willingly / To’embalme thy fathers corse; What? will he die” (71-2). The final phrase marks a point of return from the hypothetical imaginings that precede it and the speaker’s sudden realisation that what he has just proposed implies that all his problems will be solved at the death of his lover’s father. This is one of those “coining moments” when the interrupted scansion of the line serves to dramatise the spontaneous thought processes of the speaker. This final *coup de théâtre*, moreover, closes the poem with a suitably cynical sense of optimism that, like the indignant tone of the opening lines, helps characterise the speaker as a suitor both rakish and petulant.

The *Holy Sonnets*, or *Divine Meditations*, contain some of the most dramatic poems outside of the *Songs and Sonets*, although they are generally less vividly striking, I suggest, in that they carry less in the way of implicature, thus requiring less inferential work on the part of the reader. The *Holy Sonnets* are, indeed, more like soliloquies than dramatic lyrics, despite the fact that some are directly spoken to a second person addressee. In this respect they bear distinct traces of the third and final stage of the Ignatian meditative method, which Martz identifies as a “colloquy”, a kind of role-play in which the devotee enters into an implied dialogue with God.

“This is my playes last scene” is notable for the fact that it contains the most overtly theatrical imagery of any Donne poem. It displays a definite affinity with the seven-ages-of-man topos and the sense of the dramatic is sustained although not overdone. The use of theatrical allusion, moreover, is not used to deride or satirise the theatre as an institution, as Harris would maintain, by ascribing to it the role of metaphoric vehicle for deception, frivolity, or any other vice. The effect is rather that of the sense of a cosmic theatre in which God himself is the dramatist. Donne’s speaker expresses the notion that “here heavens appoint / My pilgrimages last mile” (1-2), achieving a tone of obedient compliance while also introducing the secondary but related topos of life as a journey or pilgrimage. Clearly, the poem’s speaker believes he is entering the seventh age of Jaques’s schema:

Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (*As You Like It* II, vii, 162-5)

Unlike the Shakespearean *senex*, however, Donne's moribund persona is evidently fully alert as opposed to decrepit.

Donne sets the scene through the use of demonstrative deictic shifters, "[t]his" and "here", in the opening line, which, like theatre spotlights, help focus the moment and compose the place. As the speaker considers his situation in the remainder of the first quatrain, he resorts to an intense combination of spatial and temporal vocabulary: "My *pilgrimages last mile*; and my *race* / Idly, yet *quickly* runne, hath this *last pace* / My *spans last inch*, my *minutes latest point*" (2-4, my emphasis). Though reflective, this passage has an animated, frenzied quality which culminates in the frightening prosopopoeia of "gluttonous death" (5). This figure constitutes a second persona in the drama of mortality and helps set up the ambiguity Patrides finds in "that face" (7): is the face "Gods—or, on the contrary, Satan's" (438n). Such ambiguity, moreover, highlights the fact that God is somewhat marginalised, or at least distanced, as a potential persona in the poem's dramatic action.

Unlike many of the *Holy Sonnets* "This is my playes last scene" lacks a direct addressee, at least until the final couplet. Indeed, it has a soliloquy-like quality in that the speaker is setting the scene with regard to his own situation and divulges his character by speculating as to what he hopes may happen. In a way then, he is expressing his aspirations regarding the fate of his soul after death, albeit with a specious sense of certainty based upon the precise and reliable way the *theatrum humanae vitae* topos seems to record the progression of the human creature from cradle to grave. The speaker seems somewhat uncertain about the likelihood of his hopes being fulfilled, and this uncertainty is emphasised by the voice of an inferred author who is, perhaps, implicitly accusing the speaker of underpinning his spiritual aspiration with naive syllogism.<sup>18</sup> In the light of such an observation, the poem takes on an almost comedic tone as the speaker, like that of a dramatic monologue, inadvertently exposes his folly, although this too is offset by the idea of being "purg'd of evill" (13), which hints at catharsis and the stuff of tragedy. The final couplet is in the imperative mood, and it bears the illocutionary force of a plea or entreaty in the form of a suppressed "I beg Thee". It also indicates the presence of an unnamed addressee, whom we must assume to be God, which makes the utterance an implicit invocation. God, then, is also the intended audience for the rest of the poem, and, metadramatically, of the "playes last

<sup>18</sup> Fish's interpretation of the ages-of-man topos in Donne's final sermon supports such a reading, as it indicates that the chronology of the metaphor is far from reliable in Donne's hands, and that "not content merely to arrest movement, he [Donne] reverses it" (1972 56).

scene" (cf Raleigh's "On the Life of Man": "Heaven the judicious, sharp spectator is / That sits and marks who doth act amiss" [5-6]). The poetic utterance can thus be seen both to comment upon itself as a performance while constituting its own audience. This realisation renders the poem more rhetorical; the speaker finally acknowledges that, even if only in dying, he demonstrates a degree of control over his fate.

Yet if it is God and not himself he is trying to convince, his attempts are all the more unconvincing. The tripartite construct of "the world, the flesh, and devill" (14) is a questionable conflation of three elements that are not necessarily synonymous or compatible. The speaker effectively contradicts his earlier pairing of "body" and "soul", "I" and "ever-waking part"; the effect is an undermining of his argument, which fails to convince, the life-play metaphor proving unsatisfactory in relation to the theme of salvation. The sonnet, so immersed in *theatrum mundi*, thereby provides a subtle critique of the applicability of the topos to religious aspiration, and its soliloquy-like quality is thus ironic and rhetorical rather than merely informative. Like the verse from I Corinthians upon which Donne based his sermon, the sonnet reminds us that the living can only have at best an imperfect knowledge of divine matters and of the futility of speculation arising from what a character in Margaret Edson's play *Wit*, refers to as "salvation anxiety". The voice behind the persona might as well be telling us, "For now we see through a glasse darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as also I am knowne".

I suspect many would rank the *Holy Sonnet* "Batter my heart, three person'd God" among Donne's most strikingly dramatic poems because of the force of its opening imperative phrase, which is undoubtedly one of the most impassioned, most memorable lines in the entire corpus. The alternating trochaic and iambic rhythms that characterise the opening phrase provide perhaps the finest example of the strong line, displaying a potent blend of "masculine perswasive force" and colloquial rhythm. Yet there are also structural and figurative elements in the poem that invoke a sense of metadrama and role-play on the part of the speaker.

Albrecht makes much of Donne's persona's role-play as a woman awaiting ravishment in "Batter my heart, three-personed God" (which she considers thematically to form a pair with "This is my play's last scene"). Indeed, she uses terms such as "linguistic rape" and "transvestite ventriloquist" (28-30), presumably to voice disapproval at Donne's alleged misappropriation of gender. Such a technique is not unique in Donne: among the *Songs and Sonets* "Breake of day" and "Selfe Love" both have female speakers. But the use of a female persona by a male writer hardly constitutes role-play in itself. To make such an assertion is surely tantamount to the erroneous tendency of automatically identifying the speaker with the poet, not to mention the potential censure of artistic license. If, on the other hand, we were to be presented with a speaker who is identified as female but then turns out to be a male in

disguise (in the manner of Shakespeare's Portia or Viola, for example), *then* we might have evidence of role-play, disguise, mistaken identity and other metadramatic features such as withdrawal and return or replication. Such dynamics are in fact perceivable in this poem.

The metadramatic element of "Batter my heart, three-personed God" lies not in its female persona as such but rather, I suggest, in the spatial figure from which that persona emerges. In fact, the gender of the speaker is by no means specific or constant throughout the poem. The aggressively demanding tone of the opening suggests masculinity, but "betroth'd unto your enemy" (10) and "Divorce mee" (11) are uttered in contexts that strongly imply that the speaker is female, and this appears consistent with "enthral mee" (13) "ever chaste" and "ravish mee" (14). Such a gendered reading is, of course, partially dependent upon the historical assumption or convention that dictates that God is male. Yet if, as Albrecht asserts, Donne's persona is an exercise in transvestite ventriloquism, perhaps a more thought-provoking critique of the text would question not the poet's authority to assume such a voice, but rather precisely why, as readers, we are so compelled to infer that the speaker is a woman.

The guiding figure of the sonnet is to be found in the simile "I, like an usurpt towne, to' another due, / Labour to' admit you, but Oh, to no end" (5-6). Moreover, this simile invokes the world-as-stage metaphor in relation to the metropolis, *mappa mundi*, and the city-as-stage discussed earlier. Through this image Donne effectively charts a playing space in which to stage his cosmic drama. The simile also clarifies the figurative content of the opening phrase: "Batter my heart" may be mistaken for a quasi-architectural metaphor in that one can envisage a door being battered sufficiently loud for the dweller not to miss the arrival of an expected, welcome caller. The figure of the door of a humble urban dwelling, consolidated by the somewhat tentative implications of the verbs "knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend" (2), invocative of a tinker's trade, is apt enough, but far weaker than the image of the city gates of a besieged town being pounded by the battering rams of the would be liberator. The stronger figure of the city gates<sup>19</sup> therefore emerges from the more sketchy images that precede it, just as a photographic exposure comes into focus gradually during the developing process. Similarly, the female persona emerges telescopically as an implicit metaphor embedded within the predominant simile. It is not the speaker's true voice, and in this sense it is true that he displays characteristics of both transvestism and ventriloquism. Or rather, it ultimately implies indeterminacy, perhaps appropriately, given that the soul is purportedly genderless. The feminine voice emerging from the central figure thereby

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<sup>19</sup> A long-standing biblical topos of gates traditionally applied to the soul is derived from Isaiah 45.1-2: "therefore will I weaké the loynes of Kings and open the dores before him, & the gates shal not be shut. I will go before thee & make y crooked ftreight: I will breake the brafen dorés, & burft the yron barres."



has the effect of countering, indeed cancelling out, the masculinity of the opening line to create a fractured, hermaphrodite persona. The speaker's entreaty "imprison mee" (9) is also significant, as prison imagery in Donne often carries connotations of a shadowy netherworld, of Plato's cave, and phenomenological uncertainty.

The spatial figures in "Batter my heart" are really second-order metaphors in that they are subsumed by the underlying metaphor of violated marital relations. As Patrides notes, "[m]an's relations with God have been set forth in terms of marriage or adultery ever since the great Hebrew prophets, beginning with Hosea"; he also cites an example of the trope in one of Donne's sermons (443n). The second-order figurative vehicle of the "usurpt towne" can therefore be seen as both a veiling and an embellishment of a conventional vehicle, that of marriage and adultery, which the poet can afford to present implicitly through intermittent, often oblique references that allow the principle metaphor to emerge telescopically from the secondary figure which precedes it. The resulting retrograde compound metaphor forestalls certain inferential possibilities. For example, the opening lines become more than just an impassioned plea by a devotee. Once the female persona and the nature of her purported relationship with her addressee are established, these lines acquire the taunting, mocking tones of a dissatisfied, adulterous wife seeking to emasculate an inadequate husband. In this respect, the outrageous petulance of the speaker has to be taken into account, allowing for the conclusion that she is not to be regarded as a sympathetic character. The overall tone of the poem is thus not so much one of linguistic rape, as Albrecht asserts, as it is one of role-reversal, loss of identity and emasculation, not of the addressee but of the initial voice that has the audacity to demand salvation. In this respect the poet can be seen to argue against the speaker's assumptions or wishes and impart to the reader a lesson in humility and the hope of divine grace.

"At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow" is another of the *Holy Sonnets* that uses spatial imagery while also appealing to the notion of divine grace and repentance as a more effective means of salvation than impassioned demands or indignant expectation. The metadramatic element of the poem is evident in the opening line, which conflates two concepts of the world. The first, "the round earth", presents an awareness of the earth as it is physically objectified according to modern scientific thought. The second concept of "imagined corners" invokes an awareness of cartographical representations of the world, which in turns implies the human enterprise of discovery and colonisation and the charting of previously unknown territory. As Smith notes, the line may allude to a passage from Revelation 7:1 and the juxtaposition of "round earth" and "imagined corners" could refer to maps that depict the earth as round, which had been in existence since the sixth century BC (1971 627).

The paradoxical conflation of roundness and corners also has the effect of emphasising the notion of artifice and interpretation that metadramatically parallels the

literary enterprise. Maps have to be read, after all, and globes are not only spherical maps, but also in a sense man-made worlds. A literary and artisan dimension is thereby evident, as Donne's speaker sets the scene for the hypothetical resurrection which he also curtails. The reader infers that the proposed setting is in fact heaven from the deictic implicature contained in the demonstrative "there", especially juxtaposed, as it is, with the contiguous "here" (12). Spatial and temporal dimensions are also conflated in the speaker's request that he may "mourn a space" (9). The remaining spatial reference is "this lowly ground" (12), and this marks a point of return to reality and the present, which the speaker now realises is the only appropriate setting in which to seek God's grace and to gain instruction for meaningful repentance.

"I am a little world made cunningly" is also worthy of mention here as it displays an underlying awareness of *theatrum mundi* while also utilising the microcosm/macrocosm commonplace. This soliloquy-like poem becomes a direct address to God only in the final couplet, and of particular interest is the way the familiar Renaissance commonplace of the human individual as a microcosm is supplemented by the notion of that "little world" also as an artefact, we are told, "made cunningly". One is immediately reminded of the following passage from "A Valediction of weeping":

On a round ball  
A workman that hath copies by, can lay  
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,  
And quickly make that, which was nothing, *All* (10-13)

This allusion to the manufacture of the little world that is also the speaker has two effects. First it implies that there is a creator, and this, of course, can be considered a given in a Christian poem on the subject of divinity and salvation. The point is, however, that God is not invoked, as I have mentioned, until the very end of the poem. This is necessarily so because the protagonists in the drama enacted in the poem, the speaker's body and soul, have both been benighted by "black sinne" (3). The only way for this bivalent, fractured entity to come into the presence of its creator is to endure its own destruction through his will. Thus the passive "made" of the opening line only implies the presence of a creator with whom the creature cannot be reunited until it has experienced death. The sentiment is similar to that expressed in Donne's sermon on Corinthians I 13:12, in which perfect knowledge of and by God is only to be experienced in the hereafter. Unlike the sermon, however, the poem has almost no overt visual imagery; the one reference to "eyes" (8) is a quasi-Petrarchan motif alluding to the notion of drowning in a sea of tears.

Implicit specular and textual imagery are combined, however, in the following apostrophe: "You which beyond that heaven which was most high / Have found new sphears, and of new lands can write" (5-6). These lines bring together the concept of

the arcane nature of heaven with the recent discoveries of astronomers in Donne's time, thereby providing, through an implied reference to a recent invention (the telescope), specular, optical imagery to represent spiritual vision in a manner similar to the sermon, which enlarges upon the biblical text: "For now we see through a glasse darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as also I am knowne". What is different in the poem, however, is that by invoking the astronomers as spiritual adepts, albeit metaphorically, Donne's speaker seems to be crediting them with God-like power. His request that they should drown his world is parallel to that made to God himself to consume him in fire. Consequently, there is something unsettlingly modern about the sentiment expressed in the poem, almost as if the speaker is (blasphemously) implying that scientists are the equivalent of gods in the modern age. Metadramatically speaking, this notion is doubly portentous in that as the astronomers in question evidently enjoy such an elevated status not only in finding new spheres and worlds but also, significantly, in the ability to write about them.

Finally, I shall apply the critical approach I have used throughout this chapter to what is often considered one of Donne's finest poems, although it probably does not strike most readers as particularly dramatic. "A nocturnall upon S. *Lucies* Day, Being the shortest day" has a measured, elegiac quality that is testimony to its heart-felt sincerity rather than to any obviously dramatic features. Yet sincerity is not incompatible with the dramatic; indeed, several of the poems I consider prime exemplars of the dramatic in Donne ("The good-morrow" and "The Canonization" for example) are notable for their sincerity of tone. As Gardner observes, "[t]he bright light of drama, which heightens and exaggerates, is fatal to weakness or falsity of feeling" (1965 xxii).

Although the "nocturnall" cannot be said to depict a dramatic situation as such, it does have an in *media res* opening of sorts. Saint Lucy's Day was believed to coincide with the winter solstice in Donne's time, as connoted by the poem's title, and the first line emphasises the fact that the temporal setting is the middle of the night in the very dead of winter. The dual centrality has a telescopic dimensionality which emphasises the notion of a very specific moment. Spatial location is also implied although not specified, for to be experiencing the middle of winter is to be somewhere in particular on earth. It is also significant that the opening stanza uses light imagery to illustrate a lack of light, thereby demonstrating the potential for negative capability in literary depictions of luminosity. The sun is the antithesis of those ascending or ascendent bodies of "The Sunne Rising" or "A Lecture upon the Shadow": on the contrary, here "[t]he Sunne is spent, and now his flasks / Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes" (3-4). What is interesting here is that in depicting minimal illumination Donne's speaker nonetheless makes the reader visualise that faint light rather than complete darkness. The name Lucy derives from the Latin *lux*, meaning "light", so the

poem, while ostensibly negative, carries from the start an implied promise of regeneration, a veritable flicker of hope, that is developed in the second stanza when the speaker addresses the hypothetical lovers of the “next Spring” (11). But despite this switch to apostrophe, the poem maintains a soliloquy-like quality, and this is enhanced by the sense of a real speaker in a specific geographical and temporal location that is established in the first stanza. As Clemen has noted, the convention of dramatic soliloquy is often enhanced when set during “the night-time, together with sleeplessness, brooding restlessness or tense anticipation of what is to come” (180). The midwinter setting also makes it logical to assume that the speaker is inside, so, as with some of the dramatic lyrics, one gets a strong sense of the poetic utterance occurring within a dimly lit interior setting (as the sun’s “light squibs” would provide little in the way of external illumination). The poem thus has a sense of dramatic containment despite the speaker’s ostensible attempt at self-annihilation.

Having established through implicature the sense of a real speaker, Donne attempts to undermine such a presence by having that speaker claim that he is the “Epitaph” (9) of all dead things, or of all things at the nadir of their life cycle. This assertion adds a metadramatic quality to the poem, for it is as if the poem itself has now become the speaker, since an epitaph, like a poem, is a verbal construct, a literary entity. At the same time it erases the human agency of the speaker in the manner that Fish’s essay “Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power” proposes. The notion of an epitaph would normally establish an eternising conceit, but here this is problematised by the fact that the speaker, as well as being an epitaph, is “[a] quintessence even from nothingness” (15) which, unlike the rest of creation, cannot look forward to new life in the coming spring, or, by extension, the resurrection (37). This implication is also foreshadowed by the apposition of “At the next world, that is, at the next Spring” (11). The concepts of spring and resurrection, moreover, are related telescopically in the same manner as are midnight and midwinter. These twin motifs invoke a sense of the metadramatic principle of replication that precipitates a Chinese-box-style set of dimensional relations emanating from a primary distinction between play and reality.

That “nothingness” can constitute an epitaph presents an *aporia* that undermines the very concept. This intense negativity even carries over into the beatific “Enjoy your summer all” (41) addressed to the lovers of the future. For the largesse of the sentiment is overshadowed by the weighty implication of finitude present in “all” (if understood as meaning “all the summer”, as opposed to “all you lovers”). Ultimately, it is even possible to discern an element of theatrical posturing in the “nocturnall”. It is in keeping with the diacritical exaltation with which lovers are treated in many of the neoplatonic lyrics that the speaker wishes to distinguish himself from “an ordinary nothing” (35). Indeed, among diacritical motifs, this one is unique in that the speaker

creates for himself an exclusive group of one. Even the beloved he mourns cannot be admitted to this group, since, as one whom the word “death” wrongs (28), she is neither to be numbered with those ordinary nothings invested with properties who can look forward to new life, nor with the speaker who is “every dead thing” (12). In other words, she defies ontological categorisation altogether, and it is the mutual exclusivity of the speaker and his subject that lends the poem its tragic, alienated ambience.

My aim in the above reading of the “nocturnall” has been to show that Donne utilises a similar dramatic economy as he does with the more representative of the dramatic lyrics I discussed earlier, and that such techniques can, as Gardner suggests, enhance rather than detract from sincerity of tone. In this respect it is apposite to note that the “nocturnall” is not one of Donne’s really witty poems; the governing conceit by which the speaker presents himself as the “Elixir” of “nothing” (29) ultimately fails to convince. This failure, however, adds to the poem’s strength in a peculiar way, for, rather than being dazzled by his ingenuity, the reader is more likely to be moved by the quiet despair that could move one to attempt such an analogy.

To conclude, I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter my own interpretation of the epithet “dramatic” as applied to Donne’s lyric poetry. Beginning with the “Eclogue 1613. December 26”, the closest thing to dramatic verse in the Donne corpus, I identified parallels to certain passages from Shakespeare’s plays and a metadramatic self-awareness whereby the literary artefact comments discursively upon its own production. Then followed a discussion of the handful of poems from the *Songs and Sonets*—“The Sunne Rising”, “The Flea”, “The good-morrow”, and “The Canonization”—that I consider most worthy of the epithet and, I suspect, responsible for the way the majority of readers think of Donne’s work as a whole. Finally, I discussed various poems that I consider less dramatic but nevertheless displaying features representative of Donne’s dramatic economy, concluding with an application of my observations to the brilliant but not typically dramatic “A nocturnall upon S. *Lucies* Day”.

In the group of truly dramatic poems I perceive an intense sense of dramatic economy able to evoke in the reader a vivid sense of immediate action uncluttered by descriptive passages or purple patches of intense imagery. On the contrary, it is precisely what is not stated that makes the reader take part in the creative processes by inferring details as to setting, character, relationships and so forth. Donne thereby demonstrates a keen sense of implicature; he is able to skilfully guide interpretation through that which remains unspoken and only implied within the context of the surrounding utterance. Also, it is possible to observe that the limitations of implicature and its scope for ambiguity can be utilised in a creative manner that adds to the dramatic effect achieved in some of Donne’s finest exemplars.

Specific features, techniques and devices recur in the key dramatic lyrics that give us some idea of the tools of the trade that facilitate Donne's dramatic economy. The more dramatic poems all share a sense of immediacy in the form of a dramatic situation being performed rather than narrated. These are often set within what I call sublimely lit interiors. The containment of these settings, especially in the two aubades, adds to the immediacy of the action while compensating more than adequately for an almost complete lack of visual imagery. Architectural connotations of such interior spaces serve to locate the dramatic action in a manner similar to that of the playhouse, sound-stage, or television studio. Indeed, the indeterminacy of the location of the audience has much in common with the modern, electronic dramatic media, including radio.

*In media res* openings give many of Donne's strongly dramatic poems an implied sense of plot development and interactive dialogue, as the reader is immediately aware that something has already happened or been said to determine the speaker's "response" in the form of the poetic utterance. The notion of implied dialogue and character interaction is also achieved at times between stanzas where the spaces in the text seem to allow for turn-taking, or through devices such as embedded reported speech, apostrophe, invocation, and figurative reciprocity of tenor and vehicle. Deictic elements such as personal pronouns and demonstratives also come into play in dramatising the dynamics of personal relations and creating dramatic tension, sometimes through the lack of an indexical antecedent.

The *Theatrum mundi* topos is often a feature of the poems I have discussed, either explicitly or implicitly in the form of the ages-of-man topos or the microcosm/macrocasm commonplace. Metadramatic devices such as withdrawal and return are also to be found in some of the poems, often in the form of dreams or imprisonment. One effect of metadrama is to alert the reader to the artistic processes and media at play within the artefact during its own performance, and hence to the presence of the artist, who appears to be self-consciously drawing attention to the production values in operation from "behind the scenes". Such techniques are characteristic of Shakespeare, and in addition to providing echoes (or foreshadowings) of moments in Shakespearean drama, Donne furnishes his poetry with soliloquist speakers that are often multiple, fractured personae reminiscent of, say, a Macbeth or a Hamlet. It seems fitting, then, to close with the observation that if one were to compare Donne's lyric poetry with the works of Shakespeare, it would be with the plays—comedies, tragedies, *and* histories—that the greatest affinities would be found as opposed to, say, the sonnet cycle or other non-dramatic verse. To consider Donne dramatic is, as I have argued throughout this study, a matter of inference on the part of those who read him. Such inference, however, is to a considerable degree directed by the poet himself. This chapter has explored some of the ways in which this is achieved.

The use of inference in Donne is distinctive, I believe, in that he seems peculiarly aware of what linguists now term pragmatics: the extra-linguistic, context-bound aspects of communication, or that which remains after the semantic contents (or truth conditions) of an utterance have been considered. With regard to inference specifically, I have argued that Donne makes great use of implicature and, moreover, that this is one of the key elements (if not *the* key element) of his dramatic economy. Inference is, of course, part of implicature, indeed, the result or outcome of implicature. The seeds of inference are planted by the speaker or writer in the context of assumed shared knowledge of particular circumstances. While this study has intentionally not compared Donne to other poets, such a project might well show that Donne is rare, to say the least, in his ability to prompt his reader to make meaning out of that which is not stated. Take, for example, the “white spaces” between the stanzas of “The Flea” and “The Canonization”, which are pregnant with implied meaning to the extent that the reader can effectively fill in the gaps of an implied dialogue. Donne guides or directs us not only interpretatively but also experientially through the use of implicature and other pragmatic elements such as deixis and the “turn-taking” mechanism of conversational structure.

The distinctive or especially significant role of the reader in Donne’s work is to a very large extent determined by the kind of extra- or para-linguistic features discussed above with regard to the question of inference. The reader of the most dramatic poems infers more than he or she is told and the inferential process is dialogic: Donne gives the reader considerable work to do but also considerable interpretative freedom. He does not spell out the details of the dramatic situations presented in the poems but rather saves his energy for elaborate and witty argument. Nevertheless, as I have attempted to demonstrate in my reading of such poems as “The Sunne Rising”, the reader experiences the dramatic situation and setting vividly, despite an almost total lack of descriptive language within the text.

Donne’s dramatic economy is also notable for the triangular dynamics that often obtain between speaker, addressee, and a third party or overhearer, who may be an actual character in the poem (the mistress in “The Sunne Rising”) or, implicitly, the reader (“The Sunne Rising”, “The Flea”). I suggest that Donne’s private, interior settings are also partly responsible for the way the reader often feels placed in the privileged, even furtive or subversive, position of eavesdropper. I imagine also that this feeling is in accord with the spirit of the coterie, remembering that Donne’s original intended readership was a fairly intimate group (or groups) of friends, peers, and, no doubt, rivals. And here, in relation to the coterie and the participatory role of the reader, lies the relevancy of Peabworth’s concept of the “ethos of performance”, the idea of the poem as an evanescent, expedient performance script as opposed to a stable artefact, which seems to have been Donne’s own attitude to the poems and to poetic authorship

generally (he certainly does not seem to have been bothered about preservation or ownership once a poem had been circulated having served its intended function, whether that be to entertain, delight, woo, or simply impress a prospective employer or patron). Maynard has drawn comparisons between Donne and Browning with regard to triangulation, and I fully agree with his assertion that, with Donne in particular, as readers, “we are made especially active participants in the dramatisation of the poem: almost a kind of hidden Wellesian third man, not immediately apparent, entirely reactive, yet ultimately central to the dramatic action of the poem”. In other words, the reader is placed in a position similar to that engendered in a play through the use of dramatic irony or soliloquy, becoming party to what feels like privileged information as the speaker reveals his character, implicitly and inadvertently. I see triangulation as a dimensionalising effect: the more conventional linear relations obtaining between speaker and addressee (at best dialogic in their dynamics) become a spatial rather than merely directional model. The triangle has area, it effectively lends the interpersonal dynamics of a given poem a sense of space, specifically and dramatically, a playing space, indeed, a stage.

The “co-operative principle” established by Grice as a necessary condition for successful communication with regard to implicature and other pragmatic linguistic models is not, I believe, at odds with the way Donne plays games with and manipulates his readers and, internally, his addressees. The notion I have pursued—that Donne displays a certain dramatic economy—relies upon successful and effective communication which is, moreover, achieved with seemingly little effort on the part of the poet, who, in the dramatic lyrics at least, rarely narrates or describes. The manipulation and game playing are, on the contrary, more an aspect of the semantic and rhetorical content and syntactical configurations within the poems, which are often notoriously and, I believe, intentionally difficult and convoluted. Such is, of course, the very essence of the ludic *jouissance* of Metaphysical wit. This is therefore a rhetorical rather than dramatic aspect of Donne, and I have been at pains throughout the thesis to assert that these are not mutually exclusive modes. As readers, I think we like to collude with Donne’s rakish speakers to some degree, while at the same time experiencing a willingness to be coerced, persuaded, seduced, even ravished by their strikingly outrageous arguments. But with implicature, the speaker directs rather than dictates or controls audience uptake; the guarantee of meaning is in the assumption of shared, contextual information. Relying on this, the speaker does not need explicitly to state the communication. This allows for quite precise communication, right down to nuances of attitude and so forth, but the dots have to be joined, so to speak, by the listener. As I observed in the introduction to this part of the thesis, implicature is interesting because one could be forgiven for thinking that it must often lead to misunderstanding, but in fact that is not the case due to our ability to read implicature with great accuracy through



context and assumed shared knowledge. Donne is quite remarkable in his ability to translate such conversational techniques into a textual form and a logical extension of this study would be to apply the same principles of pragmatics to other writers with a view to arriving at a comparative appraisal of the poets' intuitive ability to emulate the para-linguistic features of ordinary, real-life communication.

In arguing that the relative absence of narrative is a definitively dramatic feature in Donne's work, I am not suggesting that he never uses narrative techniques, or descriptive ones for that matter. Furthermore, I have not been concerned with the Donne canon *en masse*, but only a relatively small number of poems generally conforming to the dramatic lyric sub-genre. These poems tend to be, and I am tempted to say exclusively, exemplars of the dramatic rather than the narrative mode (which categories, as Fowler argues, are probably inadequate, non-inclusive, and, I would add, non-mutually exclusive). They have also become representative, and some would say synecdochically overly-representative, of the entire canon. It was not a central concern of this study to address this prejudice, but the very dramaticity I have explicated in its various forms explains their enduring popularity and the curious consistency with which critics have applied the epithet "dramatic" to their author. On the question of poems in which a situation is both enacted and narrated I think that this could probably be said of "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" and "The Ecstasy", possibly of some of the Elegies, such as "The Perfume" and "On his mistress", but certainly not of what I consider the truly dramatic poems ("The Sunne Rising", "The Flea" "The good-morrow", "The Canonization", and some of the Holy Sonnets). Porter's comment on drama, quoted in Part II—that it "lacks a (single) sayer of it" and that the text is "assign[ed] to a group of speakers"—seems apropos here. For although, I disagree with his insinuation that the dramatic and the lyrical are mutually exclusive, I believe that within the strictures of lyric poetry which by default is uttered by a first-person speaker, Donne comes amazingly close ("The Flea", "The Canonization") to simulating the criteria for dramatic utterance.

## CONCLUSION

The contribution made by this study to the body of scholarly work on Donne is, I hope, as follows. It is, as far as I am aware at the time of writing, the only work of this length that deals metacritically with the notion that Donne is in any special kind of way “dramatic”. The originality of the study also lies in its focuses upon the role of implicature as contributory factors to the dramatic effect of reading Donne. The first section of the thesis surveys the use of the epithet “dramatic” as it has been applied to Donne; indeed, the number of writers who have explicitly identified that quality in Donne is remarkable; so much so that it is unusual to find a paper about the poet or his work that does not use the adjective at some point. The group of critics covered is therefore selective but, I believe, representative. Not surprisingly, perhaps, such a survey of literature does not lead to a tidy, overarching theory of the dramatic in Donne; far from it. The only conclusion I have been able to reach with regard to this matter is that the term “dramatic” as applied to Donne is indeterminate in two respects. First, because Donne was not a dramatist and was not connected professionally with the theatre, the term can obviously only be applied in a figurative manner. Secondly, each critic means something quite different, strikingly or subtly, from the others in his or her use of the epithet. This, I suggest, is partly because the term “dramatic” is often applied attributively, sometimes without clarification, so that many commentators appear to beg the question as to whether the notion of the dramatic in Donne has a specific meaning. In the twentieth century in particular it appears to have become a given, or (pardon the irresistible pun) a *donné*. Ultimately, then, the idea that Donne is dramatic is a matter of inference. Each of us may consider him so for our own reasons, it would seem, and yet the idea has attained a level of almost universal acceptance. One respect in which the epithet “dramatic” remains consistent, however, is that it is never used disparagingly. If it is the case that Donne is dramatic primarily because he has been called dramatic, then there seems to be general agreement that it is a positive quality.

The ways in which the critics I have surveyed consider Donne dramatic fall more or less into three general categories which I have named *influence*, *effect*, and *response*. The first, *influence*, takes into account psychological and biographical factors of John Donne, a man living at a certain time in history. The second, *effect*, considers technical and thematic aspects of the work of Donne the writer. The third category, *response*, turns to the ways in which Donne has been interpreted, both by his contemporaries and by posterity.

The second part of my thesis presents a metacritical analysis of concepts and principles implicit in the terms *theatrum mundi* and “metadrama” respectively. The purpose of this is to provide a context within which the age of Donne can be seen to have certain preoccupations with drama as a kind of meta-trope both for the human

condition and for the practice of the arts. The world-stage metaphor, as Warnke argues, is so predominant in the late Elizabethan and Jacobean psyche as to constitute an underlying assumption upon which secondary, associated conceits may be constructed. By understanding some of the nuances of *theatrum mundi* and the principles of metadrama, we are better able to approach Donne's poetry with an eye to discerning inferences the poet would have made about his contemporary readership. These inferences would in turn enable the poet to guide the interpretative inferences of his readers. What is at work here is a kind of second-order implicature. In normal conversation, implicature, or what is not said, is only meaningful in the context of that which is said. Similarly, in literature that which is included or omitted often acquires meaning in the greater context of generic precedents to which the author may choose to conform or, on the contrary, which may be subverted, parodied, or transcended altogether giving rise to something new and original.

In Part III of the thesis I have applied the research collated in Parts I and II, where appropriate, to close readings of certain Donne poems. Here, of course, my choice of poems is selective and personal; even in the light of extensive research into the dramatic in Donne, I kept coming back to a handful of the most celebrated of the *Songs and Sonets* to best exemplify what I consider to be especially dramatic about the poet. In this respect I have done little to rectify a prejudice identified and lamented by John R. Roberts regarding what he calls a "synechdochical" critical approach to Donne:

The most unfortunate result of centering attention almost exclusively on less than half of Donne's canon is that we have developed over the years what might be called a synechdochical understanding of and appreciation for Donne's total achievement as a poet: we have, in other words, substituted the part for the whole and then proceeded as if the part were, in fact, the whole. As a result, literary historians, critics, and teachers continue to repeat generalizations about Donne's poetry that although incomplete, partial, misleading, and sometimes incorrect, have about them almost the strength of established fact and the sacredness of a hallowed tradition. Admittedly the highly dramatic poems of the *Songs and Sonets* are characteristically colloquial, metrically rough and syntactically concentrated, witty and rhetorically ingenious, and psychologically complex and subtle in argument; but unfortunately Donne's other poems are often judged, and often slighted, because they do not have any or all of these so-called Donnean qualities. (1982 64-5)

Roberts' assertions are essentially accurate and yet I feel he is fighting a campaign that is already lost. It does not seem to occur to him (or else he will not admit) that those "highly dramatic poems of the *Songs and Sonets*" remain privileged by readers, critics, and historians for justifiable reasons. As Donne himself neither published nor collected his own work, it could be argued that it is somewhat precious to be so protective of that part of the Donne canon that has received less critical attention. One achievement of this study, I maintain, has been to identify an original way of understanding some of the reasons for the popularity of certain poems. Chief amongst those reasons is a subtle

connotation of that adjective “dramatic”, which Roberts, like so many other twentieth-century commentators, is compelled to apply to Donne. Thus I conclude that Donne is dramatic primarily because his most effective work is presented like little plays, indeed little theatres, to which the reader-cum-audience is drawn and upon entrance cast into an active role that is co-creative as opposed to strictly interpretative. In all of the truly dramatic lyrics this effect is achieved largely through implicature—that which is not explicitly stated within the context of the surrounding poetic utterance—whereby the poetic audience is coerced into imaginative participation in the form of guided inference in the play of words into which it is drawn. I have suggested many times that Donne is dramatic first and foremost because he has been called dramatic. He has been called dramatic, moreover, because what he has left us is not a collection of dead literary artefacts. The great poems, the ones he will always be remembered for, despite the remonstrations of the likes of Roberts, are rightly to be thought of as performance texts, playing spaces, or “theatres of the mind”.

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